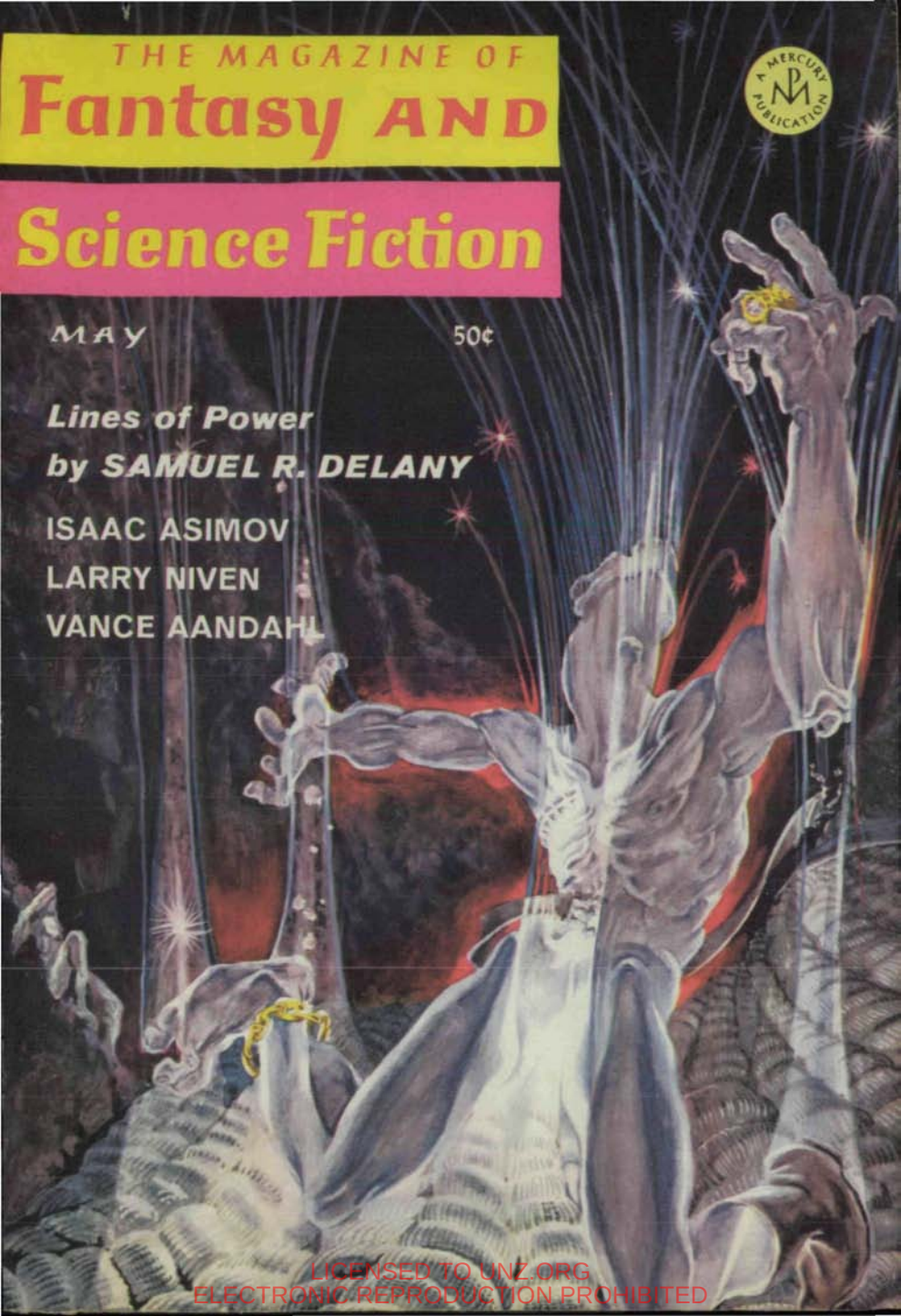

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction

MAY

Including Venture-Science Fiction

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This short novel by Nebula-award-winner Samuel R. Delany is about a time in the twenty-first century when something close to world-order has been achieved through the efficient use of power, that is, mechanical energy. There is another kind of power—the kind that decides clashes between different armies, ideas, individuals—and Delany's story is about this, too.

LINES OF POWER

we, in some strange power's employ, move on a rigorous line

by Samuel R. Delany

Only the dark and her screaming.

First: sparks glint on her feet, and crack and snap, lighting rocks, dirt. Then no screams. She almost falls, whips erect: silver leggings. Pop-pop-pop. Light laces higher, her arms are waving (trying to tell myself, "But she's dead already —"), and she waves like a woman of white and silver paper, burning on the housing of the great ribbed cable exposed in the gully we'd torn from the earth.

"Thinking about your promotion?"

"Huh?" I looked up on Scott who was poking at me with a freckled finger. Freckles, dime-sized and penny-colored, covered face, lips, arms, shoulders, got lost under the gold hair snarling his chest and belly. "What's it feel like to be a section-devil? I've been opting for it two years now." Freckled fingers snapped. "Pass me up and take you!" He leaned back in his hammock, dug under his tool belt to scratch his stomach.

I shook my head. "No, something else. Something that happened a while back. Nothing, really."

Night scoured our windows.

The Gila Monster sped.

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Light wiped the panes and slipped away.

Scott suddenly sat up, caught his toes, and frowned. "Sometimes I think I'll spend the rest of my working life just a silver-suited line-demon, dancing along them damned strings." He pointed with his chin at the sixteen-foot cross-section cable chart. "Come thirty-five, when I want to retire—and it's less than ten years off—what'll I be able to say? I did my job well?" He made a fist around the hammock edge. "I didn't do it well enough to make anything out of it." Hand open and up. "Some big black so and so like you comes along and three years later—section-devil!"

"You're a better demon than I am, Scott."

"Don't think I don't know it, either." Then he laughed. "No, let *me* tell *you*: a good demon doesn't necessarily make a good devil. The skills are different skills. The talents aren't the same. Hell, Blacky, you'd think, as your friend, I'd spare you. Say, when do you check out of this cabin? Gotta get used to somebody else's junk. Will you stay on at the old Monster here?"

"They said something about transferring me to Iguana. What with the red tape, it won't happen for a couple of weeks. I'll probably just give Mabel a hand till then. She gave me a room right over the tread motor. I complained about your snoring, and we agreed it would be an improvement."

That rated a swing; he just nodded.

I thought around for something to say and came up with: "You know I'm due an assistant, and I can choose—"

"Hell!" He flung himself back so I could only see his feet. (Underneath the hammock: one white woolen sock [grey toe], magazine, three wrenches.) "I'm no file clerk. You have me running computers and keeping track of your confusion, filing reclamation plans and trying to hunt them out again—and all that for a drop in salary—"

"I wouldn't drop your salary."

"I'd go up the wall anyway."

"Knew that's what you'd say."

"Knew you'd make me say it."

"Well," I said, "Mabel asked me to come around to her office."

"Yeah. Sure." Release, relief. "Clever devil, Mabel. Hey! You'll be screening new applicants for whoever is gonna share my room now you been kicked upstairs. See if you can get a girl in here?"

"If I can." I grinned and stepped outside.

Gila Monster guts?

Three quarters of a mile of corridors (much less than some luxury ocean liners); two engine rooms that power the adjustable treads that carry us over land and sea; a kitchen, cafeteria, electrical room, navigation offices, office offices, tool repair shop, and cetera. With such in its belly, the Gila Monster crawls through the night (at about

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a hundred and fifty k's cruising speed) sniffing along the great cables (courtesy the Global Power Commission) that net the world, web evening to night, dawn to day, and yesterday to morrow.

"Come in, Blacky," Mabel said at my knock.

She brushed back silver hair from her silver collar (the hair is natural) and closed the folder. "Seems we have a stop coming up just over the Canadian border."

"Pick up Scott's new roommate?"

"Power Cadet Susan Suyaki. Seventeen years old. Graduated third in her class last summer."

"Seventeen? Scott should like that."

"Wish she had some experience. The bright ones come out of school too snooty."

"I didn't."

"You still are."

"Oh, well. Scott prefers them with spirit."

"They're flying her in by helicopter to the site of our next job."

"Which line broke?"

"No break. It's a conversion."

I raised an eyebrow. "A rare experience for Miss Suyaki. I've only been through one, during my first couple of months in Salamander. That was a goodly while ago."

Mabel gave me a super-cynical-over-the-left-cheek-bone. "You haven't *been* in the Power Corps a goodly while. You're just brilliant, that's all."

"It was a goodly while for *me*. Not all of us have had your thirty years experience, ma'am."

"I've always felt experience was vastly overrated as a teacher." She started to clean her nails with a metal rule. "Otherwise, I would never have recommended you for promotion." Mabel is a fine devil.

"Thankee, thankee." I sat and looked at the ceiling map. "A conversion." Musing. "Salamander covered most of Mongolia. A little village in Tibet had to be connected up to the power lines. We put cable through some of the damnedest rock. They were having an epidemic of some fever that gave you oozy blisters, and the medical crew was trying to set itself up at the same time. We worked twenty-four hours a day for three days, running lines, putting in outlets, and hooking up equipment. Three days to pull that primitive enclave of skin huts, caves, and lean-tos into the twenty-first century. Nothing resembling a heater in the whole place, and it was snowing when we got there."

Over joined finger tips Mabel bobbed her chin. "And to think, they'd been dottering along like that for the last three thousand years."

"Probably not much more than a century. The village had been established by refugees from the Sino-Japanese War. Still, I get your point."

"They were happy when you left?"

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"They were happi-*er*," I said. "Still, you look at the maps—you trace cables over the world, and it's pretty hard to think there are still a few places that haven't been converted."

"I'm not as dreamy as you. Every couple of years Gila or Iguana stumbles over a little piece of the world that's managed to fall through the net. They'll probably be turning them up a hundred years from now. People cling to their backwardness."

"Maybe you're—the border of *Canada!*"

"That is the longest take I've ever seen. Wake up, boy. Here I've been telling everybody how bright you are, recommending you for promotion—"

"Mabel, how can we have a conversion on the border of Canada? You convert villages in upper Anatolia, nameless little islands in the Indian Ocean—Tibet. There's no place you could lay another cable in the Americas. A town converted to Global Power along there?"

Mabel bobbed some more. "I don't like conversions. Always something catastrophic. If everything went by the books, you'd think it would be one of our easiest maneuvers."

"You know me. I never go by the books."

"True, doll. I still don't like 'em."

Me, musing this time: "The one I was telling you about in Tibet. We had a bad accident."

Mabel asked what it was with her eyebrows.

"A burning. Middle of the night, when somebody had wandered down into the trough to trouble-shoot one of the new connections. She was climbing up on the housing, when the power went on. Some sort of high amperage short. She went up like a moth in thermite."

Mabel stopped bobbing. "Who was she?"

"My wife."

"Oh." After a moment she said, "Burnings are bad. Hell of a waste of power, if nothing else. I wondered why you chose to room with Scott when you first came on the Gila Monster rather than Jane, Judy, or—"

"Julia was the young lady out for my tired, brown body back then."

"You and your wife must have come straight out of the academy together. In your first years? Blacky, that's terrible. . . ."

"We were, it was, and it was."

"I didn't know." Mabel looked adequately sincere.

"Don't tell me you didn't guess?"

"Don't joke . . . well, joke if you want." Mabel is a fine woman. "A conversion just over the Canadian border." She shook her head. "Blacky, we're going to have a problem, you and I."

"How so, ma'am?"

"Again: you are going to have a problem with me. I am going to have a problem with you."

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"Pray, how, gentle lady?"

"You're a section-devil now. I'm a section-devil. You've been one for just under six hours. I've been one for just over sixteen years. But by the books, we are in equal positions of authority."

"Fair maid," I said, "thou art off thy everloving nut."

"You're the one who doesn't go by the books. I do. Power of authority divided between two people doesn't work."

"If it makes you feel any better, I still consider you boss. You're the best boss I ever had, too. Besides, I like you."

"Blacky," she looked up at the skylight where the moon, outside the frame, still lit the tessellations, "there is something going on out there just across the border that I guess I know more about than you. You only know it's a conversion, and where it is, is odd. Let me warn you: you will want to handle it one way. I will want to handle it another."

"So we do it your way."

"Only I'm not so sure my way is best."

"Mabel—"

"Go, swarthy knight. We meet beyond the Canadian borders to do battle." She stood up looking very serious.

"If you say so."

"See you in the morning, Blacky."

I left the office wondering at knights and days. Oh well, however, anyway: Scott was snoring, so I read until the rush of darkness outside was drifting grey.

II

The dawning sky (working top to bottom):

Sable, azure, gules—

—mountains dexter, sinister a hurst of oak, lots of pines, a few maples. The Gila Monster parked itself astride a foamy brook below a waterfall. I went outside on the balcony and got showered as leaves sprinkled the stainless flank of our great striding beast.

"Hello? Hey, hello!"

"Hi." I waved toward where she was climbing down the—whoops! into the water to her knee. She squealed, climbed back up the rock, and looked embarrassed.

"Cadet Suyaki?"

"Eh . . . yes, sir." She tried to rub her leg dry. Canadian streams at dawn are cold.

I took off my shirt, made a ball, and flung it to her. "Section-devil Jones." She caught it. "Blacky'll do. We're pretty informal around here."

"Oh . . . thank you." She lifted her silver legging, removed her boot to dry a very pretty ankle.

I gave the stairway a kick.

Clank-*chchchchchc*-thud!

The steps unfolded, and the metal feet stamped into pine needles. I went down to the bank.

"Waiting long?"

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She grinned. "Oh, I just got here."

And beyond the rocks there was a corroborative roar and snapping; a helicopter swung up through the trees.

Cadet Suyaki stood quickly and waved.

Somebody in the cockpit waved back till copper glare wiped him out.

"We saw you getting parked—" She looked down the length of Gila Monster.

I have said, or have I?

Cross a football field with an armadillo. Nurse the off-spring on a motherly tank. By puberty: one Gila Monster.

"I'll be working under you?"

"Myself and Whyman."

She looked at me questioningly.

"Section-Devil Whyman—Mabel—is really in charge. I was just promoted from line-demon yesterday."

"Oh. Congratulations!"

"Hey, Blacky! Is that my new roommate?"

"That," I pointed at Scott, all freckled and golden, leaning over the rail, "is your pardner. You'll be rooming together."

Scott came down the steps, barefoot, denims torn off mid-thigh, tool belt full of clippers, meters, and insulation spools.

"Susan Suyaki," I announced, "Scott Mackelway."

She extended her hand. "I'm glad to meet—"

Scott put a big hand on each of little Miss Suyaki's shoulders. "So am I, honey. So am I."

"We'll be working very close together, won't we?" asked Susan brightly. "I like that!" She squeezed one of his forearms. "Oh, I think this'll work out very well."

"Sure it will," Scott said. "I'm . . ." Then I saw an open space on his ear pinken. "I sure hope it does."

"You two demons get over to the chameleon nest!"

Scott, holding Sue's hand, pointed up to the balcony. "That's Mabel. Hey, boss! We going any place I gotta put my shoes on?"

"Just scouting. Get going."

"We keep the chameleon over the port tread." Scott led Sue down the man-high links of the monster's chain drive.

Thought: some twenty-four hours by, if Mabel yelled, "You two demons . . ." the two demons would have been Scott and me.

She came, all silver, down the steps.

"You smile before the joust, Britomart?"

"Blacky, I'm turning into a dirty old woman." At the bottom step, she laid her forefinger on my chest, drew it slowly down my stomach and finally hooked my belt. "You're beautiful. And I'm not smiling, I'm leering."

I put my arm around her shoul-

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der, and we walked the pine needles. She put her hands in her silver pockets. Hip on my thigh, shoulder knocking gently on my side, hair over my arm, she pondered the ferns and the oaks, the rocks and the water, the mountain and the flanks of our Gila Monster couchant, the blazes of morning between branches. "You're a devil. So there are things I can say to you, ostensibly, that would be meaningless to the others." She nodded ahead to where Scott and Sue were just disappearing around the three-meter hub.

"I await thy words most eagerly, Lady."

Mabel gestured at the monster. "Blacky, do you know what the monster, and the lines he prowls, really are?"

"I can tell you don't want an answer out of the book from your tone of voice, Miss Rules and Regulations."

"They're symbols of a way of life. Global Power Lines keep how many hundreds of thousands of refrigeration units functioning around the equator to facilitate food storage; they've made the arctic habitable. Cities like New York and Tokyo have cut population to a third of what they were a century ago. Back then, people used to be afraid they would crowd each other off the planet, would starve from lack of food. Yet the majority of the world was farming less than three percent of the arable land, and living on less than twenty percent of the world's surface. Global Power Lines meant that man could live any place on dry land he wanted, and a good number of places under the sea. National boundaries used to be an excuse for war; now they're only cartographical expedients. Riding in the Monster's belly, it's ironic that we are further from this way of life we're helping to maintain than most. But we still benefit."

"Of course."

"Have you ever asked yourself exactly how?"

"Education, leisure time," I suggested, "early and sliding retirements. . . ."

Mabel chuckled. "Oh, much more, Blacky. So much more. Men and women work together; our navigator, Faltaux, is one of the finest poets writing in French today, with an international reputation; and is still the best navigator I've ever had. And Julia, who keeps us so well fed and can pilot us quite as competently as I can, and is such a lousy painter, works with you and me and Faltaux and Scott on the same Maintenance Station. Or just the fact that you can move out of Scott's room one day and little Miss Suyaki can move in the next with an ease that would have amazed your great-great ancestors in Africa as much as mine in Finland. *That's* what this steel eggcrate means."

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"Okay," I said. "I'm moved."

We came around the hub. Scott was heaving up the second door of the chameleon's garage and pointing out to Sue where the jack and the graphite can were kept.

"Some people," Mabel went on as I dropped my arm from her shoulder, "don't particularly like this way of life. Which is why we are about to attempt a conversion here on the Canadian border."

"A conversion?" Sue popped up. "Isn't that when you switch an area or a dwelling to Global—"

At which point Scott swung at Mabel. He caught her up side the head. She yelled and went tumbling into the leaves.

I jumped back, and Sue did a thing with her Adam's apple.

Something went *Nnnnnnnnn* against the hub, then chattered away through the ferns. Ferns fell.

"Look!" Sue cried.

I was staring at the eight-inch scratch in the Gila Monster's very hard hide, at about the level where Mabel's carotid had been a moment back.

But across the water, scrambling up the rocks, was a yellow-headed kid wearing a little less than Scott.

Sue ran through the weeds and picked up the blade. "Were they trying to kill somebody?"

Mabel shrugged. "You're Cadet Suyaki? We're going to explore the conversion site. Dear me, that looks vicious."

"I used to hunt with a bolo," Sue said warily. "At home. But one of these . . . ?" Two blades were bolted in a twisted cross, all four prongs sharpened.

"My first too. Hope it's my last." She looked around the clearing. "Am I ever optimistic. Pleased to meet you, Suyaki. Well, come on, crank up Nelly. And for Pete's sakes let's get *in*."

The chameleon, ten feet long, is mostly transparent plastic, which means you can see sea, sunset, or forest right through.

Scott drove with Mabel beside him.

Me and Sue sat in back.

We found the chewed-up asphalt of an old road and crawled right along up the mountain.

"Where are . . . we going, exactly?" Sue asked.

"Honey," Mabel said, "I'll let you know when we get there." She put the throwing blade in the glove compartment with a grunt. Which does a lot of good with transparent plastic.

III

Sue leaned against the door. "Oh, look! Look down!"

We'd wound high enough and looped back far enough on the abominable road so that you could gaze down through the breaks; beyond the trees and rocks you could see the Gila Monster. It still looked big.

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"Eh . . . look up," suggested Scott and slowed the chameleon. A good sized tree had come up by the roots and fallen across the road.

The man standing in front of it was very dirty. The kid behind, peering through the Medusa of roots, was the one who had tried to decapitate Mabel.

"What . . . are they?" Sue whispered.

"Scott and Sue, you stay right here and keep the door open so we can get in fast. Blacky, we go on up."

The man's hair, under the grease, was brass-colored.

Some time ago his left cheek had been opened up, then sewn so clumsily you could see the cross stitching. The lobe of his left ear was a rag of flesh. His sleeve-ripped shirt hung buttonless and too short to tuck in, even if he had a mind to. A second welt plowed an inch furrow through chest hair, wrecked his right nipple, and disappeared under his collar.

As we came up, Mabel took the lead: I overtook her, she gave me a faint-subtle-nasty and stepped ahead again.

He was a hard guy, but the beginning of a gut was shoving over the double bar and chain contraption he used to fasten his studded belt. At first I thought he was wearing mismatched shoes: One knee-high scuffed and crack-soled boot. The other foot was bare, a length of black chain around the ankle; two toes, little and middle, gone.

I looked back at his face to see his eyes come up to mine.

Well, I was sans shirt; back at the chameleon Sue's pant leg was still rolled up. Mabel was the only one of us proofed neat and proper.

He looked at Mabel. He looked at me. He looked at Mabel. Then he bent his head and said, "Rchhht-*ah*-Pt, what are you doing up here, huh?" That first word produced a yellow oyster about eight inches north of Mabel's boot toe, six south of his bare one. His head came up, the lower lip glistening and hanging away from long, yellow teeth.

"Good morning." I offered my hand. "We're . . ." He looked at it. ". . . surveying."

He took his thumb from his torn pocket; we shook. A lot of grease, a lot of callus, it was the hand of a very big man who had bitten his nails since he was a very small boy.

"Yeah? What are you surveying?"

He wore a marvelous ring.

"We're from Global Power Commission."

Take a raw, irregular nugget of gold—

"Figured. I saw your machine down the road."

—a nugget three times the size either taste or expediency might allow a ring—

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"We've had reports that the area is under-powered for the number of people living here."

—now punch a finger-sized hole, so that most of the irregularities are on one side—

"Them bastards down in Hainesville probably registered a complaint. Well, we don't live in Hainesville. Don't see why it should bother them."

—off center in the golden crater was an opal, big as his—*my* thumbnail—

"We have to check it out. Inadequate power doesn't do anybody any good."

—small diamonds tipped the three prongs that curved to cage the opal—

"You think so?"

—in the ledges and folds of bright metal capping his enlarged knuckle were bits of spodumene, pyrope, and spinel, all abstract, all magnificent.

"Look, mister," I said, "the Hainesville report says there are over two dozen people living on this mountain. The power commission doesn't register a *single* outlet."

He slipped his hands into his back pockets. "Don't believe I have seen any, now you mention it."

Mabel said: "The law governs how much power and how many outlets must be available and accessible to each person. We'll be laying lines up here this afternoon and tomorrow morning. We're not here to make trouble. We don't want to find any."

"What makes you think you might?"

"Well, your friend over there already tried to cut my head off."

He frowned, glanced back through the roots. Suddenly he leaned back over the trunk and took a huge swipe. "Get out of here, Pitt!"

The kid squeaked. The face flashed in the roots (lank hair, a spray of acne across flat cheek and sharp chin), and jangling at her hip was a hank of throwing blades. The girl disappeared into the woods.

As the man turned, I saw, tattooed on the bowl of his shoulder, a winged dragon, coiled about and gnawing at a swastika.

Mabel ignored the whole thing:

"We'll be finished down the mountain this morning and will start bringing the lines up here this afternoon."

He gave half a nod—lowered his head and didn't bring it up—and that was when it dawned on me we were doing this thing wrong.

"We do want to do this easily," I said. "We're not here to make problems for you."

His hands crawled from his knees back to his waist.

"You can help us by letting people know that. If anyone has any questions about what we're doing, or doesn't understand something,

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they can come and ask for me. I'm Section-Devil Jones. Just ask for Blacky down at the Gila Monster."

"My name's Roger . . ." followed by something Polish and unpronounceable that began with Z. "If you have problems, you can come to me. Only I ain't saying I can do anything."

Good exit line. But Roger stayed where he was. And Mabel beside me was projecting stark disapproval.

"Where do most of the folks around here live?" I asked, to break the silence.

He nodded up. "On High Haven."

"Is there somebody in charge, a mayor or something like that I could talk to?"

Roger looked at me like he was deciding where I'd break easiest if he hit. "That's why I'm down here talking to you."

"You?" I didn't ask. What I did say was: "Then perhaps we could go up and see the community. I'd like to see how many people are up there, perhaps suggest some equipment, determine where things have to be done."

"You want to visit on High?"

"If we might."

He made a fist, and scratched his neck with the prongs of his ring. "All right." He gestured back toward the chameleon. "You can't get that any further up the road."

"Will you take us, then?"

He thought a while. "Sure." He let a grin open over the yellow cage of teeth. "Get you back down, too." Small victory.

"Just a moment," Mabel said, "while we go back to tell the drivers."

We strolled to the chameleon.

"You don't sound very happy with my attempt to make peace."

"Have I said a word?"

"*Just* what I mean. Can you imagine how these people live, Mabel, if Roger there is the head of the Chamber of Commerce?"

"I can imagine."

"He looks as bad as any of those villagers in Tibet. Did you *see* the little girl? This, in the middle of *the twenty-first century*!"

". . . just over the Canadian border. Scott," Mabel said, "take me and Sue back down to the Monster. If you are not back by noon, Blacky, we will come looking for you."

"Huh? You mean you're not going with me? Look," I told Scott's puzzled frown, "don't worry, I'll be back. Sue, can I have my shirt?"

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry! Here you are. It may be damp—"

"Mabel, if we did go up there together—"

"Blacky, running this operation with two devils admittedly presents problems. Running it with none at all is something else entirely. You're a big devil now. You know what you're doing. I even know. I just think you're crazy."

"*Ma*-bel—"

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"On up there with you! And sow as much good will as you can. If it avoids one tenth the problems I know we're going to have in the next twelve hours, I will be eternally grateful."

Then Mabel, looking determined, and Sue and Scott looking bewildered, climbed into the chameleon.

"Oh." She leaned out the door. "Give this back to them." She handed me the throwing blade. "See you by noon." The chameleon swayed off down the road. I put my shirt on, stuck the blade in my belt and walked back to Roger.

He glanced at it, and we both thought nasty-nasty-evilness at one another. "Come on." He climbed over the tree. I climbed over after.

Parked behind the trunk was an old twin-turbo pteracycle. Roger lifted it by one black and chrome, bat-form wing. The chrome was slightly flaked. With one hand he grasped the steering shaft and twisted the choke ring gently. The other hand passed down the wing with the indifference we use to mask the grosser passions. "Hop on my broomstick and I'll take you up to where the angels make their Haven." He grinned.

And I understood many things.

So:

Small Essay

on a phenomena current some fifty years back when the date had three zeroes. (Same time as the first cables were being laid and demons were beginning to sniff about the world in silver armor, doctoring breaks, repairing relays, replacing worn housings. Make the fancy sociological connections, please.) That's when pteracycles first became popular as a means of short (and sometimes not so short) range transportation. Then they were suddenly taken up by a particularly odd set of asocials. Calling themselves individualists, they moved in veritable flocks; dissatisfied with society, they wracked the ages for symbols from the most destructive epochs: skull and bones, fasces, swastika, and guillotine. They were accused of the most malicious and depraved acts, sometimes with cause, sometimes without. They took the generic name of Angels (Night's Angels, Red Angels, Hell's Angels, Bloody Angels, one of these lifted from a similar cult popular another half century before. But most of their mythic accoutrements were borrowed). The common sociological explanation: they were a reaction to population decentralization, the last elements of violence in a neutral world. Psychological: well, after all, what does a pteracycle look like?—two round cam-turbines on which you sit between the wings, then this six-foot metal shaft sprouting up between your legs that you steer with (hence the sobriquet "broomstick") and nothing else but goggles between you and the sky.

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You figure it. Concluding remarks:- Angels were a product of the turn of the century. But nobody's heard anything serious about them for thirty years. They went out with neon buttons, the common cold, and transparent vinyl jockey shorts. Oh, the teens of *siecle twenty-one* saw some goodies! The End.

I climbed on the back seat. Roger got on the front, toed one of the buttons on the stirrup (to do any fancy flying you have to do some pretty fast button pushing; ergo, the bare foot), twisted the throttle ring, and lots of leaves shot up around my legs. The cycle skidded up the road, bounced twice on cracks, then swerved over the edge. We dropped ten feet before we caught the draft and began the long arc out and up. Roger flew without goggles.

The wind over his shoulder carried a smell I first thought was the machine. Imagine a still that hasn't bathed for three months. He flew *very* well.

"How many people are there in High Haven?" I called.

"What?"

"I said, how many people are there in—"

"About twenty-seven!"

We curved away from the mountain, curved back.

The Gila Monster flashed below, was gone behind rocks. The mountain turned, opened a great rocky gash.

At the back of the gorge, vaulting the stream that plummeted the mountain's groin, someone had erected a mansion. It was a dated concrete and glass monstrosity of the late twentieth century (pre-power lines). Four terraced stories were cantilevered into the rock. Much of the glass was broken. Places that had once been garden had gone wild with vine and brush. A spectacular metal stairway wound from the artificial pool by the end of the roadway that was probably the same one we'd ridden with the chameleon, from porch to porch, rust-blotched like a snake's back.

The house still had much stolid grandure. Racked against a brick balustrade were maybe twenty pteracycles (what better launch than the concrete overhang, railing torn away). One cycle was off the rack. A guy was on his knees before it, the motor in pieces around him. A second, fists on hips, was giving advice.

We circled the gorge.

A third guy shielded his eyes to watch us. A couple of others stopped by the edge of the pool. One was the girl, Pitt, who had been down with Roger before.

"High Haven?"

"What?" Pteracycles are loud.

"Is that High Haven?"

"Yeah!" We glided between the rocks, skimmed foaming boulders, rose toward glass and concrete. Cement rasped beneath the runners and we jounced to a stop.

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A couple of guys stepped from a broken window. A couple more came up the steps. Someone looking from the upper porch disappeared, to return a moment later with five others, a girl among them.

There was a lot of dirt, a lot of hair, a number of ear rings (I counted four more torn ears; I'd avoid fights if I were going to wear my jewelry that permanent); a kid with much red hair—couldn't quite make a beard yet—straddled the cycle rack. He pushed back the flap of his leather jacket to scratch his bare belly with black nails. The dragon on his chest beat its wings about the twisted cross.

I got off the cycle left, Roger right.

Someone said: "Who's that?"

A few of the guys glanced over their shoulders, then stepped aside so we could see.

She stood by the dawn-splashed hem of glass at the side of the broken wall-window.

"He's from the Global Power Commission." Roger shoved a thumb at me. "They're parked down the mountain."

"You can tell him to go back to hell where he came from."

She wasn't young. She was beautiful though.

"We don't need anything he's selling."

The others mumbled, shuffled.

"Shut it," Roger said. "He's not selling anything."

I stood there feeling uncomfortably silver, but wondering that I'd managed to win over Roger.

"That's Fidessa," he said.

She stepped through the window.

Wide, high facial bones, a dark mouth and darker eyes. I want to describe her hair as amber, but it was an amber so dark only direct sunlight caught its reds. The morning fell full on it, spreading her shoulders. Her hands were floured, and she smeared white on her hips as she came toward me.

"Fidessa?" All right. I'm not opposed to reality imitating art if it doesn't get in the way.

"He's okay," Roger said in reponse to her look.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Get out of the way." He shoved her. She nearly collided with one of the men, who just stepped out of the way in time. She still gave the poor guy a withering *noli me tangere* stare. Kept her stuff, too.

"You want to see the place?" Roger said and started in. I followed.

Someone who looked like he was used to it picked up Roger's cycle and walked it to the rack.

Fidessa came up beside us as we stepped into the house.

"How long has this bunch been here?" I asked.

"There's been angels on High for forty years. They come; they go. Most of this bunch has been here all summer."

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We crossed a room where vandals, time, and fire had left ravage marks. The backs of the rooms had been cut into the rock. One wall, wood paneled, had become a palimpsest of scratched names and obscenities. Old motors and motor parts, a pile of firewood, rags, and chains.

"We don't want power up here," Fidessa said. "We don't need it." Her voice was belligerent and intense.

"How do you survive?"

"We hunt," Roger said as the three of us turned down a stone stairwell. The walls at the bottom flickered. "There's Hainesville about ten miles from here. Some of us go over there and work when we have to."

"Work it over a little too?" (Roger's mouth tightened.) "When you have to?"

"When we have to."

I could smell meat cooking. And bread.

I glanced at Fidessa's hips, pale with flour. They rocked with her walking; I didn't look away.

"Look." I stopped three steps from the doorway. "About the power installation here." Light over my uniform deviled the bottom of my vision.

Roger and Fidessa looked.

"You've got over two dozen people here, and you say there've been people here for forty years? How do you cook? What do you do for heat in winter? Suppose you have medical emergencies? Forget the law. It's made for you; not us."

"Go to hell," Fidessa said and started to turn away. Roger pulled her back by the shoulder.

"I don't care how you live up here," I said because at least Roger was listening. "But you've got winter sitting on your doorstep. You use liquid fuel for your broomsticks. You could have them converted to battery and run them off of rechargeable cells for a third the cost."

"Storage cells still give you about a hundred and fifty miles less than a full liquid tank."

Fidessa looked disgusted and started downstairs again. I think Roger was losing patience because he turned after her. I followed again.

The lower room was filled with fire.

Chain-pulley apparatus hung from the ceiling. Two furnaces were going. Two pit fires had been dug into the floor. The ceiling was licked across with inky tongues. Hot air brushed back and forth across my face; the third brush left it sweaty.

I looked for food.

"This is our forge." Roger picked up a small sledge and rattled it against a sheet of corrugated iron leaning on the wall. "Danny, come out here!"

Barefoot, soot smeared, the smears varnished with sweat: bellows and hammers had pulled the

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muscles taut, chiseled and defined them, so that each sat on his frame apart. Haircut and bath, admitted, he would have been a fine looking kid—twenty, twenty-five? He came forward knuckling his left eye. The right was that strange blue-grey that always seems to be exploding when it turns up (so rarely) in swarthy types like Dan.

"Hey there! What you doing?" Roger grimaced at me. "He's nearly deaf."

Danny dropped his fist from his face and motioned us into the back.

And I caught my breath.

What he'd been rubbing wasn't an eye at all. Scarred, crusted, then the crust broken and drooling; below his left eyebrow was only a leaking sore.

We followed Danny between the fires and anvils to a worktable at the back. Piles of throwing blades (I touched the one in my belt) were in varied stages of completion. On the pitted boards among small hammers, punches, and knives, were some lumps of gold, a small pile of gems, and three small ingots of silver. About the jeweler's anvil lay earrings, rings, and a buckle with none of the gems set.

"This is what you're working on now?" Roger picked up the buckle in greasy fingers already weighted with gold.

I bent to see, then pointed from the buckle to Roger's ring, and looked curious. (Why are we always quiet or shouting before the deaf?) Roger nodded.

"Danny does a lot of stuff for us. He's a good machinist, too. We're all pretty good turbo mechanics, but Danny here can do real fine stuff. Sometimes we fly him over to Hainesville and he works there."

"Another source of income?"

"Right."

Just then Pitt came between the flames. She held half a loaf of bread. "Hey, Danny!" in a voice for the deaf, "I brought you some—" saw us and stopped.

Dan looked up, grinned, and circled the girl's shoulder with one arm, took the bread in the other hand, and bit.

His smile reflected on Pitt's.

The elastic fear loosened on her face as she watched the one-eyed smith chewing crust. She was very close to pretty then.

I was glad of that.

Dan turned back to the bench, Pitt's shoulder still tucked under his arm. He fingered the rings, found a small one for her, and she pulled forward with, "Oh . . ." and the gold flickered in her palm. The smile moved about her face like flame. (The throwing blades clinked on her hip.) Silent Dan had the rapt look of somebody whose mind was bouncing off the delight he could give others.

Fidessa said, "Have they got all of the first batch out of the ovens?" She looked at the bread and actu-

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ally snarled. Then she sucked her teeth, turned, and marched away.

"Say," I asked Pitt, "do you like it up here?"

She dropped the ring, looked at me; then all the little lines of fear snapped back.

I guess Dan hadn't heard me, but he registered Pitt's discomfort. As he looked between us, his expression moved toward bewildered anger.

"Come on." Roger surprised me with a cuff on the shoulder. "Leave the kids alone. Get out of here." I was going to object to being pushed, but I guess Roger just pushed people. We left.

"Hey," Roger said, watching his feet as he walked, "I want to explain something to you." We left the fires. "We don't want any power up here."

"That has come across." I tried to sound as sincere as he did. "But there *is* the law." Sincerity is my favorite way to be belligerent.

Roger stopped in front of the window (unbroken here), put his hands in his back pockets, and watched the stream spit down the gorge.

It was, I realized, the same stream the Gila Monster was parked across a mile below.

"You know I'm new at this job, Blacky," he said after a while. "I've just been archangel a couple of weeks. The only reason I took over the show is because I had some ideas on how to do it better than the guy before me. One of my ideas was to run it with as little trouble as possible."

"Who was running it before?"

"Sam was archangel before I was, and Fidessa was head cherub. They ran the business up here, and they ran it hard."

"Sam?"

"Take a whole lot of mean and pour it into a hide about three times as ugly as mine: Sam. He put out Danny's eye. When we get hold of a couple of cases of liquor, we have some pretty wild times up here. Sam came down to the forge to fool around. He heated up one end of a pipe and started swinging it at people. He liked to see them jump and holler. That's the kind of mean he was. Danny doesn't like people fooling around with his tools and things anyway. Sam got after Pitt, and Danny rushed him. So Sam stuck the hot pipe into Danny's head." Roger twisted his ring. "When I saw that, I realized I was going to have to do something. We rumbled about two weeks ago." He laughed and dropped his hands. "There was a battle in Haven that day!"

"What happened?"

He looked at the water. "You know the top porch of Haven? I threw him off the top porch onto the second. Then I came down and threw him off onto the first." He pointed out the window. "Then I came down and threw him into the river. He hung around until I

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finally told the guys to run him down the rocks where I couldn't see 'im no more." Behind his back now he twisted his ring. "I can't see him. Maybe he made it to Hainesville."

"Did . . . eh, Fidessa go along with the promotion?"

"Yeah." He brought his hands before him. Light struck and struck in the irregularities of metal. "I don't think I would have tried for the job if she hadn't. She's a lot of woman."

"Kill the king and take the queen."

"I took Fidessa first. Then I had to . . . kill the king. That's the way things go in Haven."

"Roger?"

He didn't look at me.

"Look, you've got a kid back there at the anvil who needs a doctor. You say he's a good part of your bread and butter. And you let him walk around with a face like that? What *are* you trying to do?"

"Sam used to say we were trying to live long enough to show the bastards how mean we could be. I say we're just trying to live."

"Suppose Danny's eye infection decides to spread? I'm not casting moral aspersions just to gum up the works. I'm asking if you're even doing what you want to."

He played with his ring.

"So you've avenged Danny; you won the fair damsel. What about that infection—"

Roger turned on me. His scar twisted on his cheek and lines of anger webbed his forehead. "You really think we didn't try to get him to a doctor? We took him to Hainesville, then we took him to Kingston, then back to Hainesville and finally out to Edgeware. We carried that poor screaming halfwit all over the night." He pointed back among the fires. "Danny grew up in an institute, and you get him anywhere near a city when he's scared, and he'll try to run away. We couldn't get him in to a doctor."

"He didn't run away from here when his eye was burned."

"He lives here. He's got a place to do the few things he can do well. He's got a woman. He's got food and people to take care of him. The business with Sam, I don't even think he understood what happened. When you're walking through a forest and a tree falls on you and breaks your leg, you don't run away from the forest. Danny didn't understand that he was more important in Haven than big Sam with all his orders and bluster and beat-you-to-a-pulp if you look at him wrong: that's why Sam had to hurt him. But you try to explain that to Danny." He gestured at the fire. "I understood though." As he gestured, his eye caught on the points and blades of the ring. Again he stopped to twist it. "Danny made this for Sam. I took it off him on the bottom porch."

"I still want to know what's going to happen to Danny."

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Roger frowned. "When we couldn't get him into a doctor's office in Edgeware, we finally went into town, woke up the doctor there at two in the morning, made him come outside the town and look at him there. The doc gave him a couple of shots of antibiotics and some salve to put on it, and Pitt's made sure he puts it on every day, too. The doc said not to bandage it because it heals better in the air. We're bringing him back to check it next week. What the hell do you think we are?" He didn't sound like he wanted an answer. "You said you wanted to look around. Look. When you're finished, I'll take you back down, and you tell them we don't want no power lines up here!" He shook his finger at me with the last six words.

I walked around Haven a while (pondering as I climbed the flickering stair that even angels in Haven have their own spot of hell), trying to pretend I was enjoying the sun and the breeze, looking over the shoulders of the guys working on their cycles. People stopped talking when I passed. Whenever I turned, somebody looked away. Whenever I looked at one of the upper porches, somebody moved away.

I had been walking twenty long minutes when I finally came into a room to find Fidessa, smiling.

"Hungry?"

She held an apple in one hand and in the other half a loaf of that brown bread, steaming.

"Yeah." I came and sat beside her on the split log bench.

"Honey?" in a can rusted around the edge with a kitchen knife stuck in it.

"Thanks." I spread some on the bread and it went running and melting into all those little air bubbles like something in Danny's jewelry furnace. And I hadn't had breakfast. The apple was so crisp and cold it hurt my teeth. And the bread was warm.

"You're being very nice."

"It's too much of a waste of time the other way. You've come up here to look around. All right. What have you seen?"

"Fidessa," I said, after a silent while in which I tried to fit her smile with her last direct communication with me ("Go to hell," it was?) and couldn't. "I am *not* dense. I do *not* disapprove of you people coming up here to live away from the rest of the world. The chains and leather bit is not exactly my thing, but I haven't seen anybody here under sixteen, so you're all old enough to vote: in my book that means run your own lives. I could even say this way of life opens pathways to the more mythic elemental hooey of mankind. I have heard Roger and I have been impressed, yea, even moved, by how closely his sense of responsibility resembles my own. I too am new at my job. I still don't understand this furor over half a dozen power outlets. We come peacefully; we'll

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be out in a couple of hours. Leave us the key, go make a lot of noise over some quiet hamlet, and shake up the locals. We'll lock up when we go and stick it under the door mat. You won't even know we've been here."

"Listen, line-demon. . . ."

An eighty-seven year old granny of mine, who had taken part in the Detroit race riots in nineteen sixty-nine, must have used that same tone to a bright-eyed, civil rights worker in the middle of the gunfire who, three years later, became my grandfather: "Listen, white boy. . . ." Now I understood what granny had been trying to get across with her anecdote.

". . . you don't know what's going on up here. You've wandered around for half an hour and nobody but me and Roger have said a thing to you. What is it you think you *do* understand?"

"Please, not demon. Devil."

"All you've seen is a cross-section of a process. Do you have any idea what was here five, or fifteen years ago? Do you know what will be here five years from now? When I came here for the first time, almost ten years back—"

"You and Sam?"

Four thoughts passed behind her face, none of which she articulated.

"When Sam and me first got here, there were as many as a hundred and fifty angels at a time roosting here. Now there's twenty-one."

"Roger said twenty-seven."

"Six left after Sam and Roger rumbled. Roger thinks they're going to come back. Yoggy might. But not the others."

"And in five years?"

She shook her head. "Don't you understand? You don't have to kill us off. We're dying."

"We're not trying to kill you."

"You are."

"When I get down from here, I'm going to do quite a bit of proselytizing. Devils often speak with —" I took another bite of bread "—honeyed tongue. Might as well use it on Mabel." I brushed crumbs from my shining lap.

She shook her head, smiling sadly. "No." I wish women wouldn't smile sadly at me. "You are kind, handsome, perhaps even good." They always bring that up too. "And you are out to kill us."

I made frustrated noises.

She held up the apple.

I bit; she laughed.

She stopped laughing.

I looked up.

There in the doorway Roger looked a mite puzzled.

I stood. "You want to run me back down the mountain?" I asked with brusque ingenuousness. "I can't promise you anything. But I'm going to see if I can't get Mabel to sort of forget this job and take her silver-plated juggernaut somewhere else."

"You just do . . . this thing," Roger said. "Come on."

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While Roger was cutting his pteracycle out from the herd, I glanced over the edge.

At the pool, Pitt had coaxed Danny in over his knees. It couldn't have been sixty-five degrees out. But they were splashing and laughing like happy mud puppies from, oh, some warmer clime.

IV

A Gila Monster rampant?

Watch:

Six hydraulic lifts with cylinders thick as oil drums to adjust the suspension up another five feet to allow room for blade work. From the "head" the "plow", slightly larger than the skull of a *Triceratops*, chuckles down into the dirt, digs down into the dirt. What chuckled before, roars. Plates on the side slide back.

Then Mabel, with most of her office, emerges on a telescoping lift to peer over the demons' shoulders with telephoto television.

The silver crew itself scatters across the pine needles like polished bearings. The monster hunkers backward, dragging the plow (angled and positioned by one of the finest contemporary poets of the French language): a trough a dozen feet wide and deep is opened upon the land. Two mandibles extend now, with six-foot wire brushes that rattle around down there, clearing off the top of the ribbed housing of a sixteen-foot cable. Two demons (Ronny and Ann) guide the brushes, staking worn ribs, metering for shorts in the higher frequency levels. When the silver worm has been bared a hundred feet, side cabinets open and from over the port treads the crane swings out magnetic grapples.

One of the straightest roads in the world runs from Leningrad to Moscow. The particular czar involved, when asked for his suggestion as to just where the road should run, surprised architects and chancellors by taking a rule and scribing a single line between the cities. "There," he said, or its Russian equivalent. What with Russia being what it was in the mid-nineteenth century, there was the road built.

Excepting in some of the deeper Pacific trenches and certain annoying Himalayan passes, the major cables and most of the minor ones were laid out the same way. The only time a cable ever bends sharp enough to see is when a joint is put in. We were putting in a joint.

Inside, demons (Julia, Bill, Frank, Dimitri) are readying the clip, a U of cable ten feet from bend to end. On those ends very complicated couplings. They check couplings very carefully, because the clip carries all that juice around the gap while the joint is being inserted.

The cranes starts to squeal as up in her tower, Mabel presses the

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proper button. The clip rises from the monster's guts, swings over the gleaming rib with Scott hanging onto the rope and riding the clip like some infernal surfer.

Frank and Dimitri come barreling from between the tread rollers to join Sue outside, so that the half circle clips slip over the cable right on the chalk mark. Then Scott slides down to dance on the line, with a ratchet. Sue has another. On each end of the clip they drive down the contacts that sink to various depths in the cable.

Frank: "She uses that thing pretty well."

Dimitri: "Maybe they're teaching them something in the academy after all these years?"

Frank: "She's just showing off because she's new, hey, Sue? Do you think she'd go after a neck tourniquet if we sent her?"

The eight-foot prong goes down to center core. Sixty thousand volts there. The seven-foot six-inch goes to the steeper ground. That's a return for a three-wire high voltage line that boosts you up from the central core to well over three hundred thousand volts. Between those two, you can run all the utilities for a city of a couple or six million. Next prong takes you down to general high-frequency utility power. Then low-frequency same. There's a layer of communications circuits next that lets you plug into a world-wide computer system, I mean if you ever need a world-wide computer. Then the local antennae for radio and TV broadcasts. Then all the check circuits to make sure that all the inner circuits are functioning. Then smaller antennae that broadcast directly to Gila Monster and sibling the findings of the check circuits. And so forth. And so on. For sixteen feet.

Scott's ratchet clicks on the bolt of the final prong (he let Sue beat him—he will say—by one connection), and somebody waves up at Mabel, who has discovered they're a minute and a half behind schedule and worries about these things.

Another crane is lowering the double blade. Teeth ratch and sparks whiten their uniforms. Demons squint and move back.

Dimitri and Scott are already rolling the connecting disk on the sledge to the rim of the trough ("Hey, Sue! Watch it, honey. This thing only weighs about three hundred pounds!"

"I bet she don't make a hundred and ten.")

A moment later the blade pulls away, and the section of cable is lifted and tracked down the monster, and the whole business slips into the used-blade compartment.

The joint, which has the connections to take taps from the major cable so we can string the lines of power up to Haven itself, is rolled and jimmied into place. Ratchets again. This time the whole crew screws the lugs to the housing.

And Mabel sighs and wipes her

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pale, moist brow, having gotten through the operation without a major blackout anywhere in the civilized world—nothing shorted, casualties nil, injuries same. All that is left is for the U to be removed so that things start flowing again. And there's hardly anything that can go wrong now.

Roger got me back just as they were removing the U. I came jogging down the rocks, waved to people, bopped on up the stairs and played through the arteries of the beast. I came out on the monster's back, shielding my eyes against the noon.

The shadow of Mabel's office swung over me. I started up the ladder on the side of the lift, and moments later poked my head through the trap door.

"Hey, Mabel! Guess what's up on High Haven."

I don't think she was expecting me. She jumped a little. "What?"

"A covey of pteracycle angels, straight from the turn of the century. Tattoos, earrings, leather jackets and all—actually I don't think most of them can afford jackets. They're pretty scroungy."

Mabel frowned. "That's nice."

I hoisted to sitting position. "They're not really bad sorts. Eccentric, yes. I know you just got through connecting things up. But what say we roll up all our extension cords and go some place else?"

"You are out of your mind." Her frown deepened.

"Naw. Look, they're just trying to do their thing. Let's get out of here."

"Nope."

"They look on this whole business as an attempt to wipe them—why not?"

"Because I want to wipe them out."

"Huh? Now don't tell me you were buzzed by angels when you were a little girl and you've carried feud fodder even since."

"Told you we were going to argue, Blacky." She turned around in her chair. "The last time I had a conversion, it was a vegetarian cult that had taken refuge in the Rockies. Ate meat only once a year on the eve of the autumnal equinox. I will never forget the look on that kid's face. The first arrow pinned his shirt to the trunk of an oak—"

"Happy Halloween, St. Sebastian. *Ehhh!* But these aren't cannibals," I said, "Mabel."

"The conversion before that was a group of utopian socialists who had set up camp in the Swiss Alps. I don't think I could ever trace a killing directly to them—I'm sorry, I'm not counting the three of my men who got it when the whole business broke out into open fighting. But they made the vegetarians look healthy: at least they got it out of their systems. The one before that—"

"Mabel—"

"I assume you're interrupting me because you've gotten my point."

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"You were talking about ways of life before. Hasn't it occurred to you that there is more than one way of life possible?"

"That is too asinine for me even to bother answering. Get up off the floor."

I got up.

"If we are going to begin our argument with obvious banalities, consider these: hard work does not hurt the human machine. That's what it is made for. But to work hard simply to remain undernourished, or to have to work harder than you're able so that someone else can live well while you starve, or to have no work at all and have to watch yourself and others starve —this is disastrous to the human machine. Subject any statistically meaningful sample of people to these situations, and after a couple of generations you will have wars, civil and sovereign, along with all the neuroses that such a *Weltanshauung* produces."

"You get A for obviousness."

"The world being the interrelated mesh that it is, two hundred million people starving in Asia had an incalculable effect on the psychology and sociology of the two hundred million overfed, overleisured North Americans during the time of our grandparents."

"B for banality."

"Conclusion—"

"For which you automatically get a C."

"—there has not been a war in forty years. There were only six murders in New York City last year. Nine in Tokyo. The world has a ninety-seven percent literacy rate. Eighty-four percent of the world population is at least bilingual. Of all the political and technological machinations that have taken place in the last century to cause this, Global Power Lines are probably the biggest single factor. Because suddenly people did not have to work to starve. That problem was alleviated, and the present situation has come about in the time it takes a child to become a grandparent. The generation alive when Global Power began was given the time to raise an interesting bunch of neurotics for a second generation, and they had the intelligence and detachment to raise their bunch healthy enough to produce us."

"We've gone about as far as we can go?"

"Don't be snide. My point is simply that in a world where millions were being murdered by wars and hundreds of thousands by less efficient means, there was *perhaps* some justification for saying about any given injustice, 'What can I do?' But that's not this world. Perhaps we know too much about our grandparents' world so that we expect things to be like that. But when the statistics are what they are today, one boy shot full of arrows to a tree is a very different matter."

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"What I saw up there—"

"—bespoke violence, brutality, unwarranted cruelty from one person to another, and if not murder, the potential for murder at every turn. Am I right?"

"But it's a life they've chosen! They have their own sense of honor and responsibility. You wouldn't go see, Mabel. I did. It's not going to harm—"

"Look, teak-head! Somebody tried to kill *me* this morning with that thing you've still got in your belt!"

"Mabel—!" which exclamation had nothing to do with our argument.

She snatched up the microphone, flicked the button. "Scott, what the hell are you doing!" Her voice, magnified by the loudspeakers, rolled over the plates and dropped among the demons.

What Scott Had Done:

He'd climbed on the U to ride it back up into the monster. With most of the prongs ratcheted out, he had taken a connector line (probably saying to Sue first, "Hey, I bet you never seen this before!") and tapped the high voltage and stuck it against the metal housing. There's only a fraction of an ampere there, so it wasn't likely to hurt anything. The high voltage effect in the housing causes a brush discharge the length of the exposed cable. Very impressive. Three foot sparks crackling all over, and Scott grinning, and all his hair standing up on end. A hedge of platinum—

A river of diamonds—

A jeweled snake—

What is dangerous about it and why Mabel was upset is, (One) if something does go wrong with that much voltage, it is going to be more than serious. (Two) The U clip's connected to the (Bow!) gig-crane; the gig-crane's connected to the (Poo!) crane-house; the crane-house is anchored to the (Bip!) main chassis itself, and hence the possibility of all sorts of damage.

"Goddamn it, Scott—!"

The least dangerous thing that could have gone wrong would have been a random build-up of energies right where Scott had stuck the wire against the housing. Which I guess is what happened because he kept reaching for it and jerking his hand away, like he was being tickled.

Mabel got at the controls and pulled the arm of the rheostat slowly down. She has a blanket ban on all current, and could walk it down to nothing. All the voltage in the world won't do a thing if there're no amps behind it. "They know damned well I don't like to waste power!" she snapped. "All right, you silver-plated idiots," she rumbled about the mountain, "get inside. That's enough for today."

She was mad. I didn't pursue the conversation.

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Born out of time, I walked eye-deep in Gila droppings. Then I sat for a while. Then I paced some more. I was supposed to be filling out forms in the navigation office, but most of the time I was wondering if I wouldn't be happier shucking silver for denim to go steel wool the clouds. Why grub about the world with dirty demons when I could be brandishing my resentments against the night winds, beating my broomstick (as it were) on the evening; only all my resentments were at Mabel.

A break on the balcony from figure flicking.

And leaning on the rail, this, over-looked and -heard:

Sue and Pitt stood together on the rim of the trough. "Well, I'll tell you," Sue was saying, "I like working here. Two years in the academy after high school and you learn all about Power Engineering and stuff. It's nice 'cause you do a lot of traveling." Sue went on rather like the introduction to the Academy Course of Study brochure. Well, it's a good introduction. "By the way," she finished, and by the way she finished I knew she'd been wondering a while, "what happened to your friend's eye?"

Pitt hoofed at the dirt. "Aw, he got in a fight and got it hurt real bad."

"Yeah," Sue said, "That's sort of obvious." The two girls looked off into the woods. "He could really come out here. Nobody's going to bother him."

"He's shy," Pitt said. "And he doesn't hear good."

"It's all right if he wants to stay back there."

"It would be nice to travel around in a healer monster," Pitt said. "I'd like that."

"You want to go inside—?"

"Oh, no! Hey, I gotta get back up on High Haven." And Pitt (maybe she'd seen me on the balcony) turned and ran into the trees.

"Good-bye!" Sue called. "Thank your friend for riding me all around the mountain. That was fun." And above the trees I saw a broomstick break small branches.

I went back into the office. Mabel had come in and was sitting on my desk, looking over the forms in which I'd been filling.

I sorted through various subjects I might bring up to avoid arguing with the boss.

"It takes too much energy to sort out something we won't argue about," Mabel said. "Shall we finish up?"

"Fine. Only I haven't had a chance to argue."

"Go on."

"You go on. The only way I'll ever get you is to let you have enough cable to strangle yourself."

She put the forms down. "Take you up on that. Last bit of obvious

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banality for the day: suppose we put the outlets and lines in? They certainly don't have to use them if they don't like."

"Oh, Mabel! The whole thing is a matter of principle!"

"I'm not strangling yet."

"Look. You *are* the boss. I've said we do it your way. Okay. I mean it. Goodnight!" Feeling frustrated, but clean and silver, I stalked out.

Frank Faltaux told me that the French phrase for it is *l'esprit d'escalier*—the spirit of the backstairs. You think of what you *should* have said after you're on the way out. I lay in the hammock in my new room fairly blistering the varnish on the banister.

Evening shuffled leaves outside my window and slid gold poker chips across the pane. After much restlessness, I got up and went outside to kibitz the game.

On the stream bank I toed stones into the water, watched the water sweep out the hollow, ambled up the current, the sound of the falls ahead of me; behind, laughing demons sat on the treads drinking beer.

Then somebody called the demons inside, so there was only the evening and water.

And laughter above me . . .

I looked up the falls.

Fidessa sat there, swinging her sneaker heels against the rock.

"Hello?" I asked.

She nodded and looked like a woman with a secret. She jumped down and started over the rocks.

"Hey, watch it. Don't slip in the—"

She didn't.

"Blacky!"

"Eh . . . what can I do for you?"

"Nothing!" with her bright brown eyes. "Do you want to come to a party?"

"Huh?"

"Up on High Haven."

Thought: that the cables had not gone up there this afternoon had been mistaken for a victory on my part.

"You know I haven't won any battles down here yet." Oh, equivocations "yet."

I scratched my neck and did other things that project indecision. "It's very nice of you and Roger to ask me."

"Actually, I'm asking you. In fact," conspiratorial look, "why don't you bring one of your girls along?" For a whole second I thought it was a non-ulterior invitation. "Roger might be a little peeved if he thought I just came down to drag you up to an angel blast."

Tall, very dark, and handsome, I've had a fair amount of this kind of treatment at the hands of various ladies even in this enlightened age.

So it doesn't bother me at all. "Sure. Love to come."

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My ulterior was a chance to drag Mabel out to see my side (as devils stalked the angels' porches . . . I slew the thought).

Then again, I was still feeling pretty belligerent. Hell, who wants to take your debate rival to a party.

I looked back at the monster. Sue sat at the top of the step, reading.

"Hey!"

She looked up. I made come-here motions. She put down the book and came.

"What's Scott doing?"

"Sleeping."

One of the reasons Scott will never be a devil is that he can sleep anywhere, anytime. A devil must be able to worry all night, then be unable to sleep because he's so excited about the solution that arrived with the dawn. "Want to go to a party?"

"Sure."

"Fidessa's invited us up to High Haven. You'll have a chance to see your friend Pitt again."

She came into the scope of my arm and settled her head on my shoulder, frowning. "Pitt's a funny kid." The passing wrinkles on a seventeen-year old girl's face are charming. "But I like her." She looked up, took hold of my thumb, and asked, "When are we going?"

"Now," Fidessa said.

We climbed.

"Ever fly a broomstick?" Fidessa asked.

"I used to fly my wife back and forth to classes when I was at the academy," I admitted. (Interesting I've managed to put that fact out of this telling so long. Contemplate that a while.) "Want me to drive?"

With me at the steering shaft, Sue behind me chinning my scapula, and Fidessa behind her, we did a mildly clumsy takeoff, then a lovely spiral—"Over there," Fidessa called—around the mountain's backbone and swung up toward the gorge.

"Oh, I love riding these things!" Sue was saying. "It's like a roller coaster. Only more so!"

That was *not* a comment of my flying. We fell into the rocky mouth. (One doesn't forget how to ride a bicycle, either.) Our landing on the high porch was better than Roger's.

I found out where they did the cooking I'd smelled that morning. Fidessa lead us up through the trees above the house. (Roast meat . . .) Coming through the brush, hand in hand with Sue, I saw our late cadet wrinkle her nose, frown: "Barbecued pork?"

They had dug a shallow pit. On the crusted, gleaming grill a pig, splayed over coals, looked up cross-eyed. His ears were charred. The lips curled back from tooth and gap-tooth. He smelled great.

"Hey," Roger called across the pit. "You come up here this evening? Good!" He saluted with a beer can. "You come for the party?"

"I guess so."

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Someone came scrabbling up the rock carrying a cardboard crate. It was the red-headed kid with the dragon on his chest. "Hey, Roger, you need some lemons? I was over in Hainesville and I swiped this whole goddamn box of lemons. . . !"

Someone grabbed him by the collar of his leather jacket with both hands and yanked it down over his shoulders; he staggered. The crate hit the edge of the pit. Lemons bounced and rolled.

"Goddamn it, cut that out—"

Half a dozen fell through the grate. Somebody kicked the carton and another half dozen rolled down the slope.

"Hey—"

Half a minute into a free-for-all, two cans of beer came across. I caught them, and looked up to see Roger, by the cooler, laughing. I twisted the tops off (there was a time, I believe, when such a toss would have wreaked havoc with the beer—progress), handed one to Sue, saluted.

Fidessa had maneuvered behind Roger. And was laughing too.

Sue drank, scowled. "Say, where is Pitt?"

"Down at the house."

She flashed bright teeth at me. I nodded.

"Call me when food's on." She pulled away, skirting tussling angels, and hopped down the rocks.

Where does the mountain go when it goes higher than Haven?

Not knowing, I left the revelers and mounted among the bush and boulders. Wind snagged on pines and reached me limping. I looked down the gorge, surveyed the crowded roofs of Haven, sat for a while on a log, was peaceful.

I heard feet on leaves behind, but didn't look. Fingers on my eyes and Fidessa laughing. I caught one wrist and pulled her around. The laugh stilled on her face. She, amused, and I, curious, watched each other watch each other.

"Why," I asked, "have you become so friendly?"

Her high-cheeked face grew pensive. "Maybe it's because I know a better thing when I see it."

" 'Better'?"

"Comparative of *good*." She sat beside me. "I've never understood how power is meted out in this world. When two people clash, the more powerful wins. I was very young when I met Sam. I stayed with him because I thought he was powerful. Does that sound naive?"

"At first, yes. Not when you think about it."

"He insisted on living in a way totally at odds with society. That takes . . . power."

I nodded.

"I still don't know whether he lost it at the end. Maybe Roger simply had more. But I made my decision before they rumbled. And I ended up on the right side."

"You're not stupid."

"No, I'm not. But there's another

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clash coming. I think I know who will win."

"I don't."

She looked at her lap. "Also I'm not so young. I'm tired of being on the side of the angels. My world is falling apart, Blacky. I've got Roger; I understand why Sam lost, but I don't understand why Roger won. In the coming battle, you'll win and Roger will lose. That I don't understand at all."

"Is this a request for me in my silver long johns to take you away from all this?"

She frowned. "Go back down to Haven. Talk to Roger."

"On the eve of the war, the opposing generals meet together. They explain how war would be the worst thing for all concerned. Yet all creation knows they'll go to war."

Her eyes inquired.

"I'm quoting."

"Go down and talk to Roger."

I got up and walked back through the woods. I had been walking five minutes when:

"Blacky?"

I stopped by an oak whose roots clutched a great rock. When trees get too big in terrain like this, there is nothing for them to hold, and they fall.

"I thought I saw you wander off up here."

"Roger," I said, "things don't look so good down at the Gila Monster."

He fell into step beside me: "You can't stop the lines from coming up here?" He twisted the great ring on his scarred finger.

"The law says that a certain amount of power must be available for a given number of people. Look. Even if we put the lines up, why do you have to use them? I don't understand why this business is so threatening to you."

"You don't?"

"Like I said, I sympathize . . ."

His hands went into his pockets. It was dark enough here among the trees so that, though light flaked above the leaves, I couldn't see his expression.

His tone of voice surprised me: "You don't understand what's going on up here, do you? Fidessa said you didn't." It was fatigue. "I thought you . . ." and then his mind went somewhere else. "These power lines. Do you know what holds these guys here? I don't. I do know it's weaker than you think."

"Fidessa says they've been drifting away."

"I'm not out to make any man do what he don't want. Neither was Sam. That's the power he had and I have. You put them lines up, and they'll use them. Maybe not at first. But they will. You beat us long enough, and we go down!"

Beyond the trees I could see the barbecue pit. "Maybe you're just going to have to let it go."

He shook his shadowed face. "I haven't had it long, so it shouldn't be so hard to lost it. But no."

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"Roger, you're not losing anything. When the lines go up here, just ignore—"

"I'm talking about power. *My* power."

"How?"

"They know what's going on." He motioned to include the rest of the angels in Haven. "They know it's a contest. I'm going to lose. Would it be better if I came on like Sam? He'd have tried to break your head. Then he'd have tried to bust your tin-foil eggshell apart with broomsticks. Probably got himself and most of the rest of us in the hoosegow."

"He would have."

"Have you ever lost something important to you, something so important you couldn't start to tell anybody else how important it was? It went. You watched it go. And then it was all gone."

"Yes."

"Yeah? What?"

"Wife of mine."

"She leave you for somebody else?"

"She was burned to death on an exposed power cable, one night, in Tibet. I watched. And then she was . . . gone."

"You and me," Roger said after a moment, "we're a lot alike, you know?" I saw his head drop. "I wonder what it would be like to lose Fidessa . . . too."

"Why do you ask?"

Broad shoulders shrugged. "Sometimes the way a woman acts, you get to feel . . . Sam knew. But it's stupid, huh? You think that's stupid, Blacky?"

Leaves crashed under feet behind us. We turned.

"Fidessa . . . ?" Roger said.

She stopped in the half-dark. I knew she was surprised to overtake us.

Roger looked at me. He looked at her. "What were you doing up there?"

"Just sitting," she said before I did.

We stood a moment more in the darkness above Haven. Then Roger turned, beat back branches, and strode into the clearing. I followed.

The pig had been cut. Most of one ham had been sliced. But Roger yanked up the bone and turned to me. "This is a party, hey, Blacky!" His scarred face broke on laughter. "Here! Have some party!" He thrust the hot bone into my hands. It burned me.

But Roger, arm around somebody's shoulder, lurched through the carousers. Someone pushed a beer at me. The hock, where I'd dropped it on pine needles, blackened beneath the boots of angels.

I did get food after a fashion. And a good deal to drink.

I remember stopping on the upper porch of Haven, leaning on what was left of the rail.

Sue was sitting down by the pool. Stooped but glistening from the heat of the forge, Danny stood beside her.

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Then, behind me:

"You gonna fly? You gonna fly the moon off the sky? I can see three stars up there! Who's gonna put them out?" Roger balanced on the cycle rack, feet wide, fist shaking at the night. "I'm gonna fly! Fly till my stick pokes a hole in the night! Gods, you hear that? We're coming at you! We're gonna beat you to death with broomsticks and roar the meteors down before we're done. . . ."

They shouted around him. A cycle coughed. Two more.

Roger leaped down as the first broomstick pulled from the rack, and everybody fell back. It swerved across the porch, launched over the edge, rose against the branches, above the branches, spreading dark wings.

"You gonna fly with me?"

I began a shrug.

His hand hit my neck and stopped it. "There are gods up there we gotta look at. You gonna stare 'em down with me?"

Smoke had been going around as well as beer.

"Gods are nothing but low blood sugar," I said. "St. Augustine, Peyhoote Indians . . . you know how it works—"

He turned his hand so the back was against my neck. "Fly!" and if he'd taken his hand away fast, that ring would have hooked out an inch of jugular.

Three more broomsticks took off.

"Okay, why not?"

He turned to swing his cycle from the rack.

I mounted behind him. Concrete rasped. We went over the edge, and the bottom fell out of my belly again. Branches clawed at us, branches missed.

Higher than Haven.

Higher than the mountain that is higher than Haven.

Wind pushed my head back, and I stared up at the night. Angels passed overhead.

"Hey!" Roger bellowed, turning half around so I could hear. "You ever done any sky-sweeping?"

"No!" I insisted.

Roger nodded for me to look.

Maybe a hundred yards ahead and up, an angel turned wings over the moon, aimed down, and—his elbows jerked sharply in as he twisted the throttle rings—turned off both turbos.

The broomstick swept down the night.

And down.

And down.

Finally I thought I would lose him in the carpet of green-black over the mountain. And for a while he was lost. Then:

A tiny flame, and tiny wings, momentarily illuminated, pulled from the tortuous dive. As small as he was, I could see the wings bend from the strain. He was close enough to the treetops so that for a moment the texture of the leaves was visible in a speeding pool of light. (How many angels *can*

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dance on the head of a pin?) He was so tiny. . . .

"What the hell is our altitude anyway?" I called to Roger.

Roger leaned back on the shaft, and we were going up again.

"Where we going?"

"High enough to get a good sweep on."

"With two people on the cycle?" I demanded.

And we went up.

And there were no angels above us anymore.

And the only thing higher than us was the moon. There is a man in the moon.

And he leers.

We reached the top of our arc. Then Roger's elbows struck his sides.

My tummy again. Odd feeling: the vibrations on your seat and on your foot stirrups aren't there. Neither is the roar of the turbos.

It is a very quiet trip down.

Even the sound of the wind on the wings behind you is carried away too fast to count. There is only the mountain in front of you. Which is down.

And down.

And down.

Finally I grabbed Roger's shoulder, leaned forward, and yelled in his ear, "I hope you're having fun!"

Two broomsticks zoomed apart to let us through.

Roger looked back at me. "Hey, what were you and my woman doing up in the woods?" With the turbos off you don't have to yell.

"Picking mushrooms."

"When there's a power struggle, I don't like to lose."

"You like mushrooms?" I asked. "I'll give you a whole goddamn basket just as soon as we set runners on Haven."

"I wouldn't joke if I was sitting as far from the throttle ring as you are."

"Roger—"

"You can tell things from the way a woman acts, Blacky. I've done a lot of looking, at you, at Fidessa, even at that little girl you brought up to Haven this evening. Take her and Pitt. I bet they're about the same age. Pitt don't stand up too well against her. I don't mean looks, either. I'm talking about the chance of surviving they'd have if you just stuck them down someplace. I'm thirty-three years old, Blacky. You?"

"Eh . . . thirty-one."

"We don't check out too well either."

"How about giving it a chance?"

"You're hurting my shoulder."

My hand snapped back to the grip. There was a palm print in sweat on the denim.

Roger shook his head. "I'd dig to see you spread all over that mountain."

"If you don't pull out, you'll never get the opportunity."

"Shit," Roger said. His elbows went out from his side.

The broomstick vibrated.

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Branches stopped coming at us quite so fast. (I could see separate branches!) The force of the turn almost tore me off. I told you before, you could see the wings bend? You can hear them too. Things squeaked and creaked in the roar.

Then, at last, we were rising gently once more. I looked up. I breathed. The night was loud and cool and wonderful.

Miniature above us now, another angel swept down across the moon. He plummeted toward us as we rode up the wind.

Roger noticed before I did.

"Hey, that kid's in trouble!"

Instead of holding his arms hugged to his sides, the kid worked them in and out as though he were trying to twist something loose.

"His rings are frozen!" Roger exclaimed.

Others had realized the trouble and circled in to follow him down. He came fast and wobbling; passed us!

His face was all teeth and eyes as he fought the stick. The dragon writhed on his naked chest. It was the redhead.

The flock swooped to follow.

The kid was below us. Roger gunned his cycle straight down to catch up, wrenched out again, and the kid passed us once more.

The kid had partial control of one wing. It didn't help, because whenever he'd shift the free aileron, he'd just bank off in another direction at the same slope.

Branches again. . . .

Then something unfroze in the rogue cycle. His slope suddenly leveled and there was fire from the turbos.

For three seconds I thought he was going to make it.

Fire raked the treetops for thirty feet; we swooped over a widening path of flame. And nothing at the end of it.

A minute later we found a clearing. Angels settled like mad leaves. We started running through the trees.

He wasn't dead.

He was screaming.

He'd been flung twenty feet from his broomstick through small branches and twigs, both legs and one arm broken. Most of his clothes had been torn off. A lot of skin too.

Roger forgot me, got very efficient, got Red into a stretcher between two broomsticks, and got to Hainesville, fast. Red was only crying when the doctor finally put him to sleep.

We took off from the leafy suburban streets and rose toward the porches of Haven.

The gorge was a serpent of silver.

The moon glazed the windows of Haven.

Somebody had already come back to bring the news.

"You want a beer?" Roger asked.

"No thanks. Have you seen the little girl who came up here with me? I think it's about time we got back."

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But he had already started away. There was *still* a party going on.

I went into the house, up some stairs, didn't find Sue, so went down some others. I was halfway down the flickering steps to the forge when I heard a shriek.

Then Sue flashed through the doorway, ran up the stairs, and crashed into me. I caught her just as one-eyed Danny swung round the doorjamb. Then Pitt was behind him, scrabbling past him in the narrow well. The throwing blade in her hand, halfway through a swing.

And stopping.

"Why doesn't someone tell me what the hell is going on?" I proposed. "You put yours away, and I'll put away mine." Remember that throwing blade I had tucked under my belt? It was in my hand now. Pitt and I lowered our arms together.

"Oh, Blacky, let's get *out* of here!" Sue whispered.

"Okay," I said.

We backed up the steps. Then we ducked from the door and came out on the porch. Sue still leaned on my shoulder. When she got her breath back, she said, "They're nuts!"

"What happened?"

"I don't know, I mean. . . ." She stood up now. "Dan was talking to me and showing me around the forge. And he makes all that beautiful jewelry. He was trying to fool around, but I mean, really—with that eye? And I was trying to cool him anyway, when Pitt came in. . . ." She looked at the porch. "That boy who fell . . . they got him to the doctor?"

I nodded.

"It was the red-headed one, wasn't it? I hope he's all right." Sue shook her head. "He gave me a lemon."

Fidessa appeared at my shoulder. "You want to get down?"

"Yeah."

"Take that cycle. The owner's passed out inside. Somebody'll bring him down tomorrow to pick it up."

"Thanks."

Glass shattered. Somebody had thrown something through one of Haven's windows.

The party was getting out of hand at the far end of the porch. Still point in the wheeling throng, Roger watched us.

Fidessa looked a moment, then pushed my shoulder. "Go on." We dropped over white water, careening down the gorge.

Scott opened an eye and frowned a freckled frown over the edge of his hammock. "Where . . . [obscured by yawn] . . . been?"

"To a party. Don't worry. I brought her back safe and sound."

Scott scrubbed his nose with his fist. "Fun?"

"Sociologically fascinating, I'm sure."

"Yeah?" He pushed up on his elbow. "Whyn't you wake me?" He

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looked back at Sue who sat quietly on her hammock.

"We shook you for fifteen minutes, but you kept trying to punch me."

"I did?" He rubbed his nose again. "I did not!"

"Don't worry about it. Go to sleep. G'night, Sue."

In my room I drifted off to the *whirr* of broomsticks remembered.

Then—was it half an hour later?—I came awake to a real turbo. A cycle came near the monster's roof.

Runners . . .

Correction: landed on.

I donned silver and went outside on the long terrace. I looked to my left up at the roof.

Thuds down the terrace to the right—

Danny recovered from his leap down. His good eye blinked rapidly. The other was a wet fistful of shadow.

"What are you doing here?" I asked too quietly for him to have heard. Then I looked up the curved wall. Fidessa slid down. Danny steadied her.

"Would you mind telling me what brings you here this hour of the morning?"

After five silent seconds I thought she was playing a joke. I spent another paranoid three thinking I was about to be victim to a cunning nefariousness.

But she was terrified.

"Blacky—"

"Hey, what's the matter, girl?"

"I. . . ." She shook her head. "Roger. . . ." Shook it again.

"Come on inside and sit down."

She took Danny's arm. "Go in! Go in, Danny . . . please!" She looked about the sky.

Stolid and uncomprehending, Danny went forward. Inside he sat on the hammock, left hand wrapped in his right fist.

Fidessa stood, turned, walked, stopped.

"What's the matter? What happened on High Haven?"

"We're leaving." She watched for my reaction.

"Tell me what happened."

She put her hands in her pockets, took them out again. "Roger tried to get at Danny."

"What?"

We regarded the silent smith. He blinked and smiled.

"Roger got crazy after you left."

"Drunk?"

"Crazy! He took everybody down to the forge and they started to break up the place. . . . He made them stop after a little while. But then he talked about killing Danny. He said that Sam was right. And then he told me he was going to kill me."

"It sounds like a bad joke."

"It wasn't. . . ." I watched her struggle to find words to tell me what it was.

"So you two got scared and left?"

"I wasn't scared then." Her voice

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retreated to shortness. She glanced up. "I'm scared now."

Swinging gently, Danny put one foot on top of the other and meshed his toes.

"How come you brought Danny along?"

"He was running away. After the fracas down in the forge, he was taking off into the woods. I told him to come with me."

"Clever of you to come here."

She looked angry; then anger lost focus and became fear again. "We didn't know anywhere else to go." Her hands closed and broke like moths. "I came here first because I . . . wanted to warn you."

"Of what?"

"Roger—I think him and the rest of the angels are going to try and rumble with you here."

"What . . . ?"

She nodded.

"This has suddenly gotten serious. Let's go talk to Boss Lady." I opened the door to the corridor. "You too."

Danny looked up surprised, unfolded his hands and feet.

"Yeah, you!"

Mabel was exercising her devilish talents:

Ash tray filled with the detritus of a pack of cigarettes, papers all over everything; she had one pencil behind her ear and was chewing on another. It was one in the morning.

We filed into the office, me first, Fidessa, then Danny.

"Blacky? Oh, hello—good *Lord!*" (That was Danny's eye.)

"Hi, Mabel. How's the midnight oil?"

"If you strain it through white bread, reduce it over a slow Bunsen, and recondense the fumes in a copper coil, I hear you have something that can get you high." She frowned at Danny, realized she was frowning, smiled. "What happened to that boy's face?"

"Meet Fidessa and Danny, from High Haven. They've just run away and stopped off to tell us that we may be under attack shortly by angels who are none too happy about the lines and outlets we're putting up tomorrow."

Mabel looked over the apex of her finger tips. "This has gotten serious," she echoed. Mabel looked tired. "The Gila Monster is a traveling maintenance station, not a fortress. How have your good will efforts been going?"

I was going to throw up my hands—

"If Blacky hadn't been up there," Fidessa said, "talking with Roger like he did, they'd have been down here yesterday morning instead."

I projected her an astral kiss.

"What about him?" She nodded at Danny. "What happened to—"

"Where the hell," Scott demanded, swinging through the door like a dappled griffon, "did you take that poor kid, anyway?"

"What kid?"

"Sue! You said you went to a

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party. That's not what I'd call it!"

"What are you talking about?"

"She's got two bruises on her leg as big as my hand and one on her shoulder even bigger. She said some one-eyed bastard tried to rape—"

Then he frowned at Danny, who smiled back quizzically.

"She told me," I said, "that he tried to get fresh with her—"

"With a foot and a half of two-by-four? She told *me* she didn't want to tell *you,*" his mottled finger swung at me, "what really happened, so you wouldn't be too hard on them!"

"Look, I haven't been trying to gloss over anything I saw on—"

At which point Mabel stood.

Silence.

You-know-what were passing.

Something clanged on the skylight: cracks shot the pane, though it didn't shatter. We jumped, and Scott hiccoughed. Lying on the glass was a four-pronged blade.

I reached over Mabel's desk and threw a switch by her thumb.

Fidessa: "What . . . ?"

"Floodlights," I said. "They can see us, lights or no. This way we can see them—if they get within fifty meters." We used the lights for night work. "I'm going to take us up where we can look at what's going on," I told Mabel.

She stepped back so I could take the controls.

When the cabin rose, Danny's smile gave out. Fidessa patted his arm.

The cabin rose.

"I hope you know what you're . . ." Scott began.

Mabel told him to shut up with a very small movement of the chin.

Outside the window, broomsticks scratched like matches behind the trees.

Water whispered white down the falls. The near leaves shook neon scales. And the great cable arched the dark like a flayed rib.

Wingforms fell and swept the rocks, shadowed the water. I saw three land.

"That's Roger!"

At the window Fidessa stood at my left, Mabel at my right.

Roger's broomstick swept the cable, came down in a diminishing pool of shadow directly on the line. I heard runners scrape the housing. Half a dozen more angels had landed on either side of the trough.

Roger, at the far end of the exposed line up near the rocks, dismounted and let his broomstick fall on its side. He started slowly to walk the ribbing.

"What do they want?" Scott asked.

"I'm going to go out and see," I said. Mabel turned sharply. "You've got peeper-mikes in here." The better to overhear scheming demons; if they'd been on, Mabel would have been able to foresee Scott's little prank of the afternoon. "Hey! You remember Scott's little prank of the afternoon? You can duplicate it from here, can't you?"

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"A high voltage brush discharged from the housing? Sure I can—"

"It'll look so much more impressive at night! I'm going out there to talk to Roger on the cable. If anything goes wrong, I'll yell. You start the sparks. Nobody will get hurt, but it should scare enough hell out of them to give me a chance to get out of harm's way." I flipped on the peeper-mike and started for the trap door. An introductory burst of static cleared to angel mumblings.

Mabel stopped me with a hand on my shoulder. "Blacky, I can make a brush discharge from in here. I can also burn anybody on that line—"

I looked at her. I breathed deeply. Then I pulled away and dropped through to the Gila Monster's roof. I sprinted over the plated hull, reached the "head" between two of the floods, and gazed down. "Roger!"

He stopped and squinted up into the light. "—Blacky?"

"What are you doing here?"

Before he answered, I kicked the latch of the crane housing and climbed down onto the two-foot grapple. I was going to yell back at Mabel but she was watching. The crane began to hum, and swung forward with me riding, out and down.

When I came close to the cable, I dropped (floodlights splashing my shoulders); I got my balance on the curved ribbing. "Roger?"

"Yeah?"

"What are you doing down here?"

On the dirt piled beside the cable the other angels stood. I walked forward.

"What are you doing? Come on; it's the third time I've asked you." When the wire is sixteen feet in diameter, a tightrope act isn't that hard. Still. . . .

Roger took a step and I stopped. "You're not going to put up those cables, Blacky."

He looked awful. Since I'd seen him last he'd been in a fight. I couldn't tell if he'd won or lost.

"Roger, go back up on High Haven."

His shoulders sagged; he kept swallowing. Throwing blades clinked at his belt.

"You think you've won, Blacky."

"Roger—"

"You haven't. We won't let you. We won't." He looked at the angels around us. "IS THAT RIGHT!" I started at his bellow.

They were silent. He turned back and whispered, "We won't. . . ."

My shadow reached his feet. His lay out behind him on the ribbing.

"You came down here to make trouble, Roger. What's it going to get you?"

"A chance to see you squirm."

"You've done that once this evening."

"That was before . . ." He looked down at his belt. My stomach tight-

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ened. ". . . Fidessa left. She ran away from me." Hung on his cheek scar, confusion curtained his features.

"I know." I glanced over my shoulder where the office swayed above the monster. In the window were four silhouettes: two women and two men.

"She's up . . . ?" The curtain pulled back to reveal rage. "She came down here to you?"

"To us. Have you got that distinction through your bony head?"

"Who's up there with her?" He squinted beyond the floodlights. "Danny?"

"That's right."

"Why?"

"She said he was running away anyway."

"I don't have to ask you. I know why."

"They're listening to us. You can ask them if you want."

Roger scowled, threw back his head. "Danny! What you running away from me for?"

No answer.

"You gonna leave Haven and Pitt and everything?"

No answer.

"Fidessa!"

Yes . . . Roger?

Her voice, so firm in person, was almost lost in the electronic welter.

"Danny really wants to run down here with the devils?"

He . . . does, Roger.

"Danny!"

No answer.

"I know you can hear me! You make him hear me, Fidessa! Don't you remember, Danny . . . ?"

No answer.

"Danny, you come out of there if you want and go on back with me."

As Roger's discomfort grew to fill the silence, the kindest thing I could think was that, just as Danny had been unable to comprehend Sam's brutalities, so he could ignore Roger's generosities.

"Fidessa?"

Roger?

"You coming back up to High Haven with me." Neither question mark nor exclamation point defines that timbre.

No, Roger.

When Roger turned back to me, it looked like the bones in his head had all broken and were just tossed in a bag of his face.

"And you . . . you're putting up them cables tomorrow?"

"That's right."

Roger's hand went out from his side; started forward. Things came apart. He struck at me.

"Mabel, *now!*"

When he hit at me again, he hit through fire.

The line grew white stars. We crashed, crackling. I staggered, lost my balance, found it again.

Beyond the glitter I saw the angels draw back. The discharge was scaring everybody but Roger.

We grappled. Sparks tangled his lank hair, flickered in his eyes, on his teeth; we locked in the fire. He

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tried to force me off the cable. "I'm gonna . . . break . . . you!"

We broke.

I ducked by, whirled to face him. Even though the other angels had scattered, Roger had realized the fireworks were show.

He pulled at his belt.

"I'll stop you!"

The blade was a glinting cross above his shoulder.

"Roger, even if you do, that's not going to stop—"

"I'll kill you!"

The blade spun down the line.

I ducked and it missed.

"Roger, stop it! Put that blade —" I ducked again, but this blade caught my forearm. Blood ran inside my sleeve. "Roger! You'll get burned!"

"You better hurry!" The third blade spun out with the last word.

I leaped to the side of the trough, rolled over on my back—saw him crouched with the force of the next blade, now dug into the dirt where my belly had been.

I had already worked the blade from my own belt. As I flung it (I knew it was going wild, but it would make Roger pause), I shrieked with all rage and frustration playing my voice, "*Burn* him!"

The next blade was above his head.

Off balance on my back, there was no way I could have avoided it. Then:

The sparks fell back into the housing.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Mabel, in the office window, move to the rheostat.

Roger stiffened.

He waved back; snapped up screaming. His arm flailed the blade around his head.

Then the scream was exhausted.

The first flame flickered on his denims.

His ankle chain flared cherry and smoked against the skin.

The blade burned in his hand.

Broomsticks growled over the sky as angels beat retreat. I rolled to my stomach, coughing with rage, and tried to crawl up (the smell of roast meat . . .), but I only got halfway to the top before my arm gave. I went flat and started to slide down toward the line. My mouth was full of dirt. I tried to swim up slope, but kept going down. Then my feet struck the ribbing.

I just curled up against the cable, shaking, and the only thing going through my mind: "Mabel doesn't like to waste power." And crying.

V

Gules, azure, sable—

(Working bottom to top.)

"You sure you feel all right?"

I touched the bandage beneath torn silver. "Mabel, your concern is sweet. Don't overdo it."

She looked across the chill falls.

"You want to check out Haven before we go to work?"

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Her eyes were red from fatigue. "Yeah."

"Okay. There's still a broomstick —aw, come on."

Just then the chameleon swung up the roadway with Scott, properly uniformed now, driving. He leaned out, "Hey, I got them down to town. Doctor looked at Danny's eye." He shrugged.

"Put it away and go to bed."

"For twenty minutes?"

"More like a half an hour."

"Better than nothing." Scott scratched his head. "I had a good talk with Danny. No, don't worry. He's still alive."

"What did you say?"

"Just rest assured I said it. And he heard it." He swung the door closed, grinned through it, and drove off toward the hub.

A way of life.

Mabel and I went up on the monster's roof. Fidessa and Danny had left it there. I'd tried to make them take it with them. They'd refused. Mabel hesitated again before climbing on.

"You can't get the chameleon up the road," I told her.

The turbos hummed and we rose above the trees.

We circled the mountain twice. As Haven came into view, I said: "Power, Mabel: how do you delegate it so that it works for you. How do you set it up so that it doesn't turn against itself and cause chaos?"

"You just watch where you're flying."

High Haven was empty of angels. The rack was overturned and there were no broomsticks about. In the forge the fires were out. We walked up the metal stairway through beer cans and broken glass. Up at the barbecue pit I kicked a lemon from the ashes.

"The devils gain Haven only to find the angels fled."

"Sure as hell looks like it."

On the top porch Mabel said, "Let's go back down to the Gila Monster."

"You figure out where you're going to put in your power outlets?"

"Everyone seems to have decided the place is too hot and split." She looked at her bright toe. "So if there's nobody living up here, there's no reason to run power up here—by law. Maybe Roger's won after all."

"Now wait a minute—"

"I've been doing a lot of thinking this morning, Blacky."

"So have I."

"Then give a lady the benefit of your ponderings."

"We've just killed somebody. And with the world statistics being what they are. . . ."

Mabel brushed back white hair. "Self-defense and all that. I still wonder whether I like myself as much this morning as I did yesterday."

"You're not putting lines up?"

"I am not."

"Now wait a minute. Just because—"

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"Not because of that. Because of nothing to do with angels. Because of what angels have taught me about me. There's nobody up here anymore. I go by the books."

"All right. Let's go back then."

I didn't feel particularly good. But I understood: you have to respect somebody who forces you to accept his values. And in that situation, the less you agree, the more you have to respect.

We flew back down the mountain.

Some history here:

I was transferred at the end of the week to Iguana. Six months later word came over the line that Mabel had retired. So Global Power lost another good devil. Iguana lumbers and clanks mainly about Drake's Passage, sniffing around in Antarctica and Cape Horn. Often I sit late in the office, remembering, while the cold south winds scour the skylight—

Forgot something:

Later, I went to look at Roger's body. It had fallen by the line. We were going to let the Gila Monster bury him.

I thought the ring might have melted. But only the hand was badly burned. I took it off and climbed out of the trough. As I came over the mound, between the brush and the tree trunks, something moved.

"Pitt?"

She darted forward, changed her mind, and ducked back.

"Do you want to take this back to Danny?" I held out the ring.

She started forward, saw what I held. A gasp, she turned, fled to the woods.

I put the ring in my pocket.

Just then Sue, all sleepy-eyed and smiling, stepped onto the balcony and yawned. "Hello, Blacky."

"Hi. How do you feel?"

"Why? Isn't it a perfectly—"

She flexed her arm. "Sore shoulder." (I frowned.) "Nothing so bad I can't [sigh] work."

"That's good."

"Blacky, what was the commotion last night? I woke a couple of times, saw lights on. Did Mabel send everybody back to work?"

"It wasn't anything, honey. You just stay away from the trough until we cover it up. We had some trouble there last night."

"Why? Isn't it a perfectly—"

"That's an order."

"Oh. Yes, sir."

She looked surprised but didn't question. I went inside to help Mabel get things ready to leave.

I kept the ring.

After transfer, I wore it.

I still do.

And often, almost as often as I think about the winter in Tibet, I recall the October mountains near the Canadian border where the sun sings cantos of mutability and angels fear to tred now; where still, today, the trees unleave, the wind unwinds, and the foaming gorge disgorges. ◄

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"How come we draw all the shaggy dog cases?"

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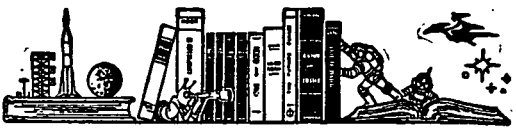
BOOKS



THE AUTHOR'S NAME IS MIGUEL Angel Asturias.* The book costs $7.95, and it has just won a Nobel Prize for Literature, which would be irrelevant except it probably means it will take a bit longer to come out in paperback, but also means that if your local library doesn't already have it, they can be persuaded to buy. Presumably a variety of book clubs are also rushing it onto their lists. But if you have no other way to read it, sacrifice a bottle of scotch or a first-run movie date or a bag of grass or whatever *your* thing is, and buy the Delacorte edition of MULATA.

This is the book about Celestino Yumi, also known as Hayumihaha, and later as the dwarf/wizard Chiltic, and his wife Caterina or Catalina or Zabala, who is also the witch Giroma, and about the corn-demon Tazol and the terrible seductress without a name, the Mulata. Or these at least are the central characters in a fabulous adventure which mingles science and sorcery and sociology, magic, myth, and materialism, allegory and earthiness, sex, religion, politics, priests, peasants, bears, boars, porcupines, devils and demons and democrats, and *lots* more. Think of H. Rider Haggard at his peak, then add Leiber's dark eroticism, Sturgeon's tenderness, Farmer's earthiness. Ballard's vivid juxtapositions, Dick's surrealist time-sense, Cordwainer Smith's sophisticated symbolism, Walter Miller's bitter insight, Zelazny's mythanalysis, Delany's mythopoetry, Aldiss' great laughter, Disch's erudite despair, Simak's dignity-in-simplicity —what more can I say? This is the kind of book that might have happened here if *Unknown* had had a chance to grow up. It is fun; it is frightening; it is fascinating. Read it.

Translated by Gregory Rabassa

I was less impressed by another "outside" book, the much-publicized MARGARITA AND THE MASTER by Mikhail Bulgakov, which I read in the shorter Grove Press version, translated by Mirra Ginsburg (available in paperback for 95¢). A recent serious intellectual review began by acknowledging the book as "a masterpiece" and concluded by calling it an "incomplete work of art." Incomplete it

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is; a masterpiece, hardly; a work of art, doubtfully. Three separate strains run through the book, never successfully integrated: a rather sentimental reconstruction of the Passion with Pilate as the civilized, sensitive, ambivalent protagonist; a slapstick-buffoonery satire of the Soviet literary/intellectual Establishment; and a fine evocative fantasy of witchcraft and demonism built around a particularly intriguing characterization of the Devil manifested in modern Moscow.

Well worth reading, if you dismiss the notion of a suppressed masterpiece before you start—but even then a good deal less rewarding than R. A. Lafferty's treatment of some similar themes in THE PAST MASTER. This is Lafferty's first novel, the first original published in the new Ace Specials line, and probably the first "category" science fiction book in the decade since A CANTICLE FOR LIEBOWITZ to be considered as a valid successor to Miller's classic novel. It is going to be a hard act for Ace to follow.

You could describe it as a novel about Thomas More in Utopia, but that would be a laughably simplistic description of a complex, subtle, colorful, and highly sophisticated book, which manages, at half the length, to touch on almost as wide a range of marvellous, mystical, and maniacal phenomena as the Asturias novel. Page for page, in fact, I suspect it jams in as much incident and imagery as well; and if I must add that it does not quite achieve the same depth or impact each time, this is less a criticism than an accolade, in that it is possible to compare the two books at all.

To some extent, any discussion will sound like a comparison, because the topics here, besides Utopia, are Hell and the nature of devils and of The Devil; politics, affluence and poverty; psyche and psychology; magic, theology, technology, cosmology, and the human condition. The setting is, mostly, a planet called Astrobe in the fairly far future, and the characters (in addition to More, transported from old Chelsea) include the child-witch Evita who is 200 years old; Rimrock, the "ansel," a telepathic mutant sea-creature; Paul, the outlaw astronaut; Father Oddopter of the green-robes, a monk whose duty it is to kill the devil every day; King Charles the 612 of the Feral Lands; some Programmed People of Astrobe; the lungers of Cathead; some killer machines; Walter Copperhead, the necromancer; and the rulers of Astrobe, headed by a triumvirate described in the opening paragraphs:

> The three big men were met together in a private building of one of them. There was a clattering thunder in the street outside, but the sun was shining. It was the clashing thunder of the mechanical killers, ravening

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and raging. They shook the building and were on the verge of pulling it down. They required the life and the blood of one of the three men and they required it immediately, now, within the hour, within the minute.

The three men gathered in the building were large physically, they were important and powerful, they were intelligent and interesting. There was a peculiar linkage between them: each believed that he controlled the other two, that he was the puppeteer and they were the puppets. And each was partly right in this belief. It made them an interlocking nexus, taut and resilient, the most intricate on Astrobe.

Cosmos Kingmaker, who was too rich. The Heraldic Lion.

Peter Proctor, who was too lucky. The Sleek Fox.

Fabian Foreman, who was too smart. The Worried Hawk.

"This is Mankind's third chance," said Kingmaker. "Ah, they're breaking the doors down again. How can we talk with it all going on?"

He took the speaking tube. "Colonel," he called out. "You have sufficient human guards. It is imperative that you disperse the riot. Is is absolutely forbidden that they murder this man at this time and place." . . .

"Foreman," said Peter Proctor softly within the room. "Whatever you are thinking this day, do not think it so strongly. I've never seen the things so avid for your life."

I restrain the impulse to quote more at length. Lafferty magics me with humor, anger, and love, and with unpredictable corner-of-the-eye perspectives and perceptions, but above all, I suspect, with his word-music. And yet—

—yet there is something missing here, something a little bit less than complete. I do not think it is simply a lack of my own kind of logic: I do not have to *agree* with Lafferty's manner of reasoning to be both enchanted and—can I say?—*ideated* by it. Perhaps it is actually a much lesser instance of the same lack I feel much more forcibly in two other recent novels by two of my favorite authors, Clifford Simak and A.J. Budrys.

I must hasten to add, after that introduction, that I *liked* both these books; I enjoyed reading them; they are both well-written, satisfying as stories, and thought-provoking. Most of the science-fiction-labeled novels I see are either unreadable or totally forgettable, and even the small balance remaining—the books I feel are worth at least mentioning here—can claim nothing more than competence in execution combined with a clever concept somewhere or a colorful image somewhere else, or maybe even both together. I can understand why people want to read them, but not at all why anyone wants to write them. (I think it is shortsighted practicality for a clever and competent man to write a novel just because a publisher is willing to sign a contract with him; if there is nothing in particular he wants to write *about,* he can

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make a good deal more money in a variety of other ways.)

But those are *other* books. None of this applies to either Simak's THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE, (Putnam, $3.95) or Budrys' THE AMSIRS AND THE IRON THORN (Fawcett, 50¢). Both Simak and Budrys had something to say, and I think it may have been something worth hearing: at least the hints they gave me left me feeling as though I had missed something somehow *important*. What baffles me with these two books is: why should two men of far more than routine ability, with sufficient prestige *and* publishing connections not to have to worry unduly about conforming to standard editorial restrictions on length, format, or style, have selected the magazine-style category-science-fiction novel as a vehicle for concepts completely outside the form?

By "outside the form" I mean, in Budrys' case, that all his most telling points could have been made more effectively in a present-day novel, which did not weaken the pictures he drew by making them appear to be exaggerated. He was not writing about where we are going, or what might be, but about where we *are at*. (Okay, Ajay: I am with you in everything you say about canned kicks, empty erudition, pseudo-sophistication, super-security, and valueless victories; and I don't even demand that you come up with a solution—I cannot believe you meant to imply that ignorant barbarism is any more blissful than ignorant civilization? But the portrait of decay would be sharper and stronger if the faces of the characters were not lost in an unlikely future.)

The damnedest thing is, Budrys manages to make the whole improbable and inappropriately conceived thing first-rate reading—while you're reading. Imagine what a talent like this could do with all the stops pulled out?

THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE is "outside the form" in a different sense. Simak's symbolic structure is well-selected and carefully modeled. His choice of a near-future world is absolutely right, because he is talking specifically about choices that lie only a short time ahead of us, and developmental paths we have already—largely unconsciously—embarked upon. Both the special nature of the protagonist, Andrew Blake, and the triple personality with which he is endowed are integral to the theme—as is Blake's preoccupation with identifying and comprehending these aspects of himself throughout the first half of the book. Then, when the introduction is completed, and the stage cleared for the beginning of the action—we are abruptly initiating the final sequence, tying up plot-ends, and rushing into the final clinch.

There was much more to be said; it was an ambitious concept,

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obviously thought through seriously and with care; it deserved something more than to turn into a (very) well told routine novel.

Three recent volumes of short stories are worth noting here; one of them can be enthusiastically recommended—Terry Carr's second solo anthology, NEW WORLDS OF FANTASY (no connection with the British magazine, except for two—out of fifteen—inclusions), one of the best collections I have seen in a long time, and certainly a bargain bundle at 60¢ (from Ace). Only four stories seemed to me less than first-rate, and (unseemly as it may sound) I can best indicate my opinion of the rest by saying that seven of them were, one year or another, barely skin-of-the-tooth dropouts from the last round of decisions for inclusions in my own Annuals; and three others *are* scheduled for inclusion in two upcoming anthologies of mine.

The three: R. A. Lafferty's "Narrow Valley" which concerns an Indian, some unusual homesteaders, a powerful spell, and the meaning of "credibility gap." Katherine MacLean's "The Other," very short, very strong, a psychiatrist story to set opposite John Collier's classic "Interpretation of a Dream." Thomas M. Disch's "The Squirrel Cage," which might serve as a model of what (one kind of) "New Thing" story is *really* like, when it's done right.

The seven: Mildred Clingerman's "A Red Heart and Blue Roses," Carr's own "Stanley Toothbrush," Peter S. Beagle's "Come Lady Death," Curt Clark's "Nackles," Ballard's "The Lost Leonardo," Keith Roberts' "Timothy" and Alfred Gillespie's "The Evil Eye."

Four entries by Zelazny, Brunner, Ray Russell, and Avram Davidson strike me as somewhat below their own usual standards, as well as that of the rest of the book. The 15th item is Jorge Luis Borges' "The Immortal"—which I consider one of his lesser works, leaving it only head (less shoulders) above almost anything else being written. (Why this, when "Funes the Memorious" and "The Garden of Forking Paths" have still not been used in any s-f anthologies? And while I'm in parentheses, let me add quickly that Grove has just reissued FICCIONES in an attractive $2.45 paperback edition.)

I am not one of your really wild way-out Wyman Guin people, but they are numerous, and in a milder way I share their enthusiasm. In any case, the Avon Original collection, LIVING WAY OUT, is long overdue, and worth a good bit more than 60¢ if only for "The Delegate from Guapanga," "Volpla," and "Beyond Bedlam." "My Darling Hecate" and "The Root and the Ring" are trivial but amusing. As for "A Man of the Renaissance" and "Trigger Tide"—it probably means something pro-

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found, but I don't know what, that I read both of these stories straight through, with interest, when the book arrived a month ago, knowing I had read them (with interest) when they were first published, but unable to remember anything about them; and now I can't remember them again.

PATH INTO THE UNKNOWN (Delacorte, $4.95) is the American edition of a British anthology of Soviet SF compiled by an editor at the London firm of McGibbon and Kee. (Despite the misleading design of the jacket, and the careless impressions of some reviewers, I had nothing to do with this collection beyond writing an introduction for the American edition.) Like the editor, the translators have—wisely in several cases—elected to remain unnamed. I list the book here, not because it is of really superior quality, but because it is of such *good* quality compared to everything we have seen from the USSR before. Vladislav Krapivin's "Meeting My Brother" and Arkady Strugatsky's "Wanderers and Travellers" in particular represent a leap of something like thirty years of s-f development from the sort of Gernsback-era talky technocratic stories in earlier Soviet anthologies. Sever Gansovsky's "A Day of Wrath" and G. Gor's "The Boy" are not only absorbing stories (give or take a little irritation with the translations, especially in the Gansovsky), but on another level I suspect they will do more to dispel American preconceptions of the character of daily life in the USSR than any number of magazine articles, lectures, or interviews might do.

Meanwhile, over in the Art Department, three choice items:

First and with whoops of joy, Gahan Wilson's first hardcover cartoon collection: THE MAN IN THE CANNIBAL POT, from Doubleday, bargain-priced at $2.95. Sacrilege maybe, but I mean it: *almost* as good is THE CHAS ADDAMS MOTHER GOOSE (Windmill Books, $4.95)—27 Mother Goose rhymes illustrated in macabre, some more so than others. At the price, I'd suggest you can look at Three Blind Mice, Little Miss Muffett, Doctor Fell, and Jack Sprat at the bookstore counter before the proprietor feels you have wandered overtime into unfair usage; the others aren't all that Addams, really.

Finally, a long-overdue mention of BOKANALIA, a memorial portfolio of Hannes Bok's lithographs: 15 prints beautifully reproduced on good paper, at least half of them excellent choices even for those who, like myself, fall short of being all-out Bok addicts. Available for $3.00 from Emil Petaja, P.O. Box 14126, San Francisco, Calif. 94114.

—JUDITH MERRIL

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LETTERS TO THE BOOK EDITOR

IN SEARCH OF COMMENT

What! You cannot comment at length on Damon Knight's IN SEARCH OF WONDER (*Books*, Sept. 1967)? For one of the only three existing (regular) reviewers of science fiction not to review one of the only two existing books of *criticism* on science fiction is, I protest, a disaster for the serious consideration of our much loved but too little examined field. Come, let us not be cowardly, I implore you, let us get down to brass tacks and say what is right and wrong about this book.

If Damon chops his classics with a cleaver and dissects his trash with a stiletto, is this fair? Maybe so, but I would like to know if your reservations coincide with mine, especially since I have never heard of anyone else who has been willing to find any fault with this admittedly beautiful and perceptive, on the whole, collection. For example: who else but a technician like Damon would ever be crazy enough to spend some 20 pages trying to create a plot out of the chaos in van Vogt's THE WORLD OF NULL-A? The trouble with Mr. Knight is that he is too linear, while van Vogt is mosaic, and it seems to me that Damon violates the rules of criticism by imposing his own will on the story and trying to read and judge it in terms that no one ever intended should be applicable. Damon refuses to give in, to get himself out of the way. It's like asking for a beginning, climax, and end in CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.

Finally, I would like to report, I have just read a book which I believe should be required reading for all science fiction authors: THE UNCOMMITTED by Kenneth Kenniston, a study of alienated youth in American society. In a wider sense it is a beautiful delineation of the ills in our society which cause alienation; it is about the human tolls of a technological society. Although science fiction is supposed to be about technology and its influence on man, it has been remarkably devoid of any treatment of the hippies, the LSD, the mysticism and search for the wholistic experience, the changes in family structure, etc., which may be some of the most important things happening.

Willem Van den Broek
Ann Arbor, Michigan

TEENY-BOPPER SCIENCE FICTION?

I suppose it is an inevitable evil that all movements have their heresies, but *really* Miss Merril . . . Teeny-Bopper Science Fiction? It is one thing to emulate the genuinely avante-garde; it is quite another to subvert an as-yet-innocent literary movement with the vapidity of Jean-Paul Sartre and the carefully-rehearsed rhetoric of a week-end hippie. And you seem bent upon the latter.

For example: "Berkley has made at least a half-way move with an (hot, boy! translated from the French) item called SEXUALIS '95 about 'a world totally engaged in the pleasures of erocticism'." (That's Miss Merril smacking her lips in the

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February 1968 *F & SF.*) You need not drool over SEXUALIS '95. Why read all those pages when all you have to do is trot over to 42nd Street and watch the girls at the Gayety peel to the tune of "Born Free."

Why get all hot and bothered about the "multi-leveled chrome and glass cities (that) provide their residents with neighborhood LSD parlors" in LOGAN'S RUN that Miss Merril found so worthy of praise, when all you have to do is pick up the latest issue of *Look* or *Life* and gape at all the pretty pictures of Tim Leary & His Gang portrayed in 47 vivid colors?

The essence of Miss Merril's heresy is that she is attempting to present science fiction without reference to its distinguishing element: The new, the unknown, the speculative in the world of ideas. She has taken the sickness of 20th century America and introduced it as something new and daring in science fiction. I most certainly do not object to social commentary in science fiction, but the stuff that Miss Merril raves of is not social commentary at all. What Miss Merril has done is taken the sordid, stamped "avante-garde" on it in great big multi-colored psychedelic script, labeled it a literary ideal, and proclaimed it as a major revolution in science fiction.

Not so. There is nothing revolutionary about mindlessness. What *is* revolutionary is a literary movement concerned with *ideas*. Such a movement is science fiction; let's keep it that way.

Dennis Raimondo
Yorktown, N.Y.

This section is open to: 1) reactions to the reviews and general observations of the Book column, and 2) comments on books of interest that have not been mentioned in the regular book review column. Comments should be limited to 250 words and addressed to: Letters, Fantasy and Science Fiction, 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022.

BOOKS RECEIVED

FICTION

CRYPTOZOIC! Brian W. Aldiss, Doubleday 1968, $4.50

THE DOOMSDAY MEN, Kenneth Bulmer, Doubleday 1968, $4.50

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? Philip K. Dick, Doubleday 1968, $3.95

THE DAY BEFORE FOREVER and THUNDERHEAD, Keith Laumer, Doubleday 1968, $3.95

THE GREEN ROUND, Arthur Machen, Arkham House 1968, $3.75

GENERAL

HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION, Alexei Panshin, introduction by James Blish, Advent (P. O. Box 9228, Chicago 60690) 1968, $6.00

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The author of this absorbing fantasy about a ballet company is a 33-year-old New Yorker who "used to be a professional dancer, then went into radio . . . a logical step from being seen and not heard to being heard and not seen." Mr. Searles is drama and literature director for New York's listener sponsored radio station, WBAI-FM and has been instrumental in getting a good deal of fantasy and science fiction on the air: dramas, readings and reviews.

THE WILIS

by Baird Searles

ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF the audience that sees a ballet company bathed in an ethereal blue light drift dreamily across the stage in a performance of *Les Sylphides* knows just what a sweaty, smelly, temperamental, and downright insane bunch of people that same company is backstage and offstage. Of course, everyone has heard about the dramatic and colorful lives and personalities of ballet folk, but that is really a fiction, like saying all stepmothers are mean and cruel. Dancers are just folks making a living, like the rest of us. Sure they are.

I really should not have said the rest of us, since I am involved in that screwy world, too. My official title is company manager. It sounds important, and I do carry a bit of weight, but what it really amounts to is playing nursemaid to approximately seventy rank individualists. These overgrown and overmuscled children all belong to the Gotham Ballet Company (unofficially known as Gotbal), and my job is to keep track of them when we are playing our long season in New York, which is more or less our home base, and to ride herd on them when we are on tour, which is what we do for about six months of the year. I have to see that they catch the right trains and know where the station is; that hotel reservations are made and that they don't try to sneak *too* many people

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into a room without paying; that they know what opera house, theater, high school auditorium, or cow barn we are playing and are all there when half-hour is called for performance (and just as important, rehearsal, which goes on constantly, every day, no matter where we are or how far we have traveled the night before). I sober them up. I pay them. And I listen to all their personal little problems, try to settle their little quarrels, and intercede for them with the powers that be.

I guess everyone knows what happened last spring in the Gotham Ballet Company. It gave culture in general, and ballet in particular, more publicity than Mrs. Kennedy has, and that's saying a good deal. But there was one thing that did not get into the papers. And that was a miracle, since everyone in the company knew about it. But even the *Daily News* would have hesitated to print this, I think.

The fall-winter tour had been a good one, as such things go. We had kept a full complement of dancers, there had been no really serious injuries, and everyone was still speaking to everyone else, with the exception of the epic silence that Carmen Vladimirova held against poor Tom O'Leary because he had brought the curtain up three bars early on *Raymonda,* while she was leaning over to retie her ballet shoe, and had given the audience a good look at the backside of a tutu.

My one main worry was a big one. It had to do with our prima ballerina, Lyda Volpe. The company has two official ballerinas (which is a word that is bandied about much too much; it's a title), Lyda and the aforementioned Miss Vladimirova. This was not as explosive a situation as it might seem, since they balanced each other nicely. Carmen is a brilliant dancer and can shoot across the stage in a shower of sparks that will bring the house down. *Firebird* is her ideal role, and *Firebird* she is. But Lyda could do everything that Carmen could do, albeit a shade less brilliantly, and carried in her dancing a lyric womanliness that Carmen would never have. Carmen could make you cheer, but Lyda made you cry. And so even Carmen acknowledged Lyda as the prima ballerina. And they were remarkably close friends, which was also surprising, since their temperaments varied as wildly as their dancing. Carmen was everybody's cliche idea of the ballerina. She exuded Russian glamor like a Volga fog. The publicity stories she had released over the years read like a bad novel. She had been born in a boxcar in China, while her parents, members of an itinerant Russian opera company, were fleeing before the invading Japanese. They eventually ended up in the Khyber Pass (a neat trick), and she had spent her child-

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hood in the Vale of Kashmir. She had been the world's youngest ballerina at the opera house in Buda (or was it Pest) during the war, dancing through the bombardments and helping the underground by carrying messages in her toeshoes. And so on. I happened to know that her parents were two perfectly ordinary Russian emigres who lived in the Bronx, but I kept *my* mouth shut. It was more fun her way.

Lyda, on the other hand, *had* been born abroad. She had spent her childhood during the war in Estonia and had come to the U.S. with her parents just after the war. From that time on she had done nothing but study dancing and eventually, having stripped her life of everything *but* dancing, hit the top through pure intensity. And now, at the age of 26, she was in love for the first time. And it was not going very well.

Things started coming to a head in Philadelphia, our last stop before New York. Philadelphia, despite its reputation ("I spent two weeks in Philadelphia last Sunday"), was always a fairly happy spot for us. The hardships of the tour were over, the triumphs (or disasters) of the New York season were just ahead, and everyone's friends, lovers, husbands and what have you, traditionally came down from New York. I didn't happen to have anyone, but it seemed as if everyone else did, at least one. The company was getting more applause at performances than it had for months—it's amazing how a few friends in the crowd can help.

And Lyda's man came, too. I had met him several times; he had flown out to Detroit to see her when we were there. I had been left pretty cold when I had met him, but there was no accounting for taste. There had, of course, been endless speculation about him in the company, where the boys are, if possible, worse gossips than the girls, and I gathered the consensus of opinion was about the same as mine.

"An advertising executive, for Christ's sake!" I remembered one of the corps girls saying. "*Nobody* marries advertising executives."

"Except other advertising executives," said the boy curled up in the seat beside her.

"Mark my words," said the girl. "Oil and water don't mix. Lyda may be untemperamental and quiet, but she is not *that* quiet, and neither is the life that she is used to." And she settled back to her knitting, managing to look, as so many of the ballet girls do, like a fifteen-year old spinster.

I was thinking about this conversation when I went into the opera house the evening of our last performance in Philly. I had run into Lyda and her love that day shopping in Wanamaker's. I wouldn't say that they had been fighting, but I also wouldn't say

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that they looked like two starry-eyed people on the verge of getting married, either.

I gave a big hello to the stage doorman; he informed me that both Miss Vladimirova and Miss Hunt were looking for me. Moving into the cavernous gloom of the unsetup and dimly lit backstage area, I paused to catch my favorite moment in the theater before involving myself with mere people.

It's an old cliche with theater goers that the best part of a performance is the hush of expectation before the curtain goes up. But most of them think that that curtain has been down since last night's performance. This is not so. It has been up all day and descends just before the early comers of the audience arrive. If you come in some time before half-hour is called for the performers, you stand on a stage lit by only one dim bulb, surrounded by the strange shapes of various bits of scenery, with the Mammoth Cave of the auditorium stretching its rows of empty seats far into the black reaches of the upper balconies and the equally black stretches of the flies going impossibly far above you. This is the real moment of expectation. A dancer scurries in, and another. They pause briefly to look at the stage, then run to their dressing rooms for makeup and costumes. More and more come in. The technicians arrive and the curtain comes down to keep the soon-to-arrive audience from knowing how their magic is being brewed for them. The stage lights go on. The dancers are straggling back onto the stage now to warm up. The costumes for the several ballets to be done that night will appear in ridiculous juxtaposition as their wearers bend, flex, stretch, run and lift each other. The tempo increases—it seems impossible that anything ordered will come out of this madhouse of gyrating dancers and sweating stagehands setting up scenery. The lights change color several times in a surrealist way as the light board is tried out. Places are called over the "bitch box"—the intercom leading to the dressing rooms. There is a final sweep of movement—people offstage who are supposed to be on, and the reverse tide. Then the house lights are dimmed, the overture (if any) begins, a final look around to see if all is where it should be, and the curtain rises. "God's athletes" are creating their magic.

I didn't have much time for anticipation that night. It was one of those evenings when everyone had decided to put in an early appearance. Several of the dancers were already warming up. I patted the backside of my favorite corps girl as she did a forehead to ankles bend. She got up in time to deliver a well-placed kick with the very solid end of her blocked toeshoe. I was the recipient of a pat on the backside from

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my favorite corps boy. "None of that, Arthur, my boy," I said. "I have a position to uphold."

"That's the point," he said. "When are we going to go dancing? I've heard there is a marvelous new bar in New York now."

This is a standing joke with us. He knew I didn't share the usual male dancer's inclinations, but neither of us was going to be intolerant about it. I was about to make one of my usual scintillating comebacks when I saw Miss Vivien Hunt bearing down on me from across stage like a largish piece of scenery that had taken off on its own.

"Good evening, Vivien," I said respectfully.

And I did respect her. Any woman who can carry the weight of a ballet company—financial, artistic and managerial—for twenty years deserves respect. This was an admirable achievement, since aside from an opera company, a ballet troupe is probably the most expensive and least lucrative of any single artistic endeavor.

Yes, indeed, I respected her . . . but that does not mean that I always liked her.

"Benjie, dear!" she said, drawing me to an unoccupied corner of the stage, "in all my twenty years of this company, I have never—I repeat, never—run into a problem like this. I simply do not know what to do."

"About what, Vivien?" I asked, knowing full well.

"Lyda, my dear boy! What shall we do about it? I've seen the problem developing, but I hoped it would work itself out. But that man is in her dressing room now, and she's crying, and Carmen is trying to get dressed for *Barcarolle*, and Lyda has *Giselle* to do tonight. I don't know what we can do about the situation as a whole, but we had better do something about the performance tonight."

"Just what can I do to help, Vivien," I said, choosing my words with care. The last thing on earth that I wanted was to be involved in a lovers' quarrel.

"Well, I don't want anything personal to be made out of all this, so I thought that you, in your official capacity, might politely ask him to leave. After all, he isn't really supposed to be here, you know."

Technically she was right, but I knew damn well that if she had felt like it, she would have given him the gate in no uncertain terms. I was to be the goat if anything unpleasant happened.

"All right," I said. "I'll do what I can."

Lyda and Carmen shared a dressing room—even ballerinas have to double on the road. They did it by choice in New York, though, so obviously it was no hardship. At the moment, from the looks of things, however, Car-

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men would have rather been anywhere else. She was slathering on makeup in a haphazard way that meant that she would have to do the whole thing over again before curtain. Lyda was huddled in her chair, dressed in the wrapper that is a uniform for the dancer about to apply makeup and—what was his name, I thought frantically; oh yes, Peters—was leaning over her, talking intensely. We beat our way through the garden of tutus hanging by the door. Carmen didn't turn around, but she raised an eyebrow at us in the mirror. There was a moment of silence. I cleared my throat.

"Uh, Mr. Peters, I'm about to call half-hour. We'd appreciate backstage being cleared of everyone but personnel."

Peters collected himself with an effort and turned on Lyda. "We're at a traumatic point in our relationship, and *you* have to put on a silly costume and dance!"

Lyda looked at him. "This is my work," she said. "I have to do this just as you have to be at the agency at nine o'clock every morning."

He wilted a little around the edges. "I know that, darling, and I appreciate what you're doing. But we're more important than anything to me."

Carmen gave a small snort, and I began to get the picture. Mr. Peters was undoubtedly what was known as a "cultured" man, who went to the opera and the ballet regularly, but in his world, the performing arts were just a cut above vaudeville, or maybe even a good deal above, but still the same idea. Therefore, it was impossible to conceive that anyone could find them as all-important in the general scheme of things, as for instance, his all-powerful agency. I'd just like to see Lyda ask him to give that up.

Mr. Peters retreated in good order, promising Lyda that he would be out front and would be back for her after the performance. I went to call half-hour, or what was left of it, for the rest of the company, leaving Lyda to Vivien and Carmen.

Carmen told me more as we were waiting for the curtain to go up on *Barcarolle,* that Venetian extravaganza. "The whole situation is like a bad novel," she said.

"He says, 'You must give up the dancing if we are to marry,' and she says, 'The dancing is my life and I don't know if I can give it up. I know nothing else.' And he says, 'Then you do not love me,' and they go on and on. I do not understand this kind of love. For me, love is complicated, but not like this. If it gets in my way, then out with it."

"All people don't love the same," I said.

"Lyda is trying to love two things. She is like a child that wants all. You cannot dance and love as your American men want

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to be loved. Mr. Peters is also a child. He cannot stand for her to love something else. I do not know what to tell her. Vivien tells her much, but I think that Vivien thinks first of the company, and I cannot blame her. But it does not make her advice the best." The music started to lead up to her entrance, and I could see her automatically begin to count the measures mentally. "But if she loves the man," she said, as she folded herself into the prop gondola on which she entered, "she cannot just tell him to go away." She floated out on stage in a blue spotlight, dabbling her hand prettily on the stage floor.

Lyda, to my knowledge, had never given a bad performance. She gave one that night. The company as a whole has sometimes given a bad performance. They gave the worst one ever that night.

Barcarolle went more or less OK. It's a kind of "Masque of the Red Death" as conceived by Walt Disney, and quite a production, so it didn't really matter what the dancers were doing. The audience could look at the scenery and costumes. *Giselle* is something else again. What *Hamlet* is to the actor and *Carmen* to the diva, *Giselle* is to the ballerina, the supreme test of her ability. There is no particular mystic reason for this. I remember Lyda discussing the role one day on the train when one of the more avant-garde of the boys said that *Giselle* was nineteenth-century romanticism to the point of idiocy.

"Of course it can be played like that and usually is," she said, "but the character is really valid if you make a few allowances. She certainly makes as much sense as Juliet or Ophelia when you get right down to it."

Somebody said something disparaging about happy peasant girls, and Lyda said, "What do you want from the nineteenth century, social realism? The first act is no real problem. Here you have a Rhineland peasant girl, none too bright, who likes to dance and is in love. She may act a little silly, but who doesn't when they're in love?" (Lyda had just started seeing Mr. Peters at that point.) "When her mother warns her that frivolous girls who like too much to dance die young and become Wilis, she behaves like all young girls given good advice. And when she finds that her peasant lover is highborn and has a fiancée to boot, of course she is unhinged. That mad scene isn't Ophelia mad. It's rage and grief and despair—it's a girl growing up with sorrow too fast. Of course she kills herself—and the sword that gave the show away is the handiest thing."

"And the Wili—go on, justify the Wili," said the avant-garde boy.

"Well, if you must justify them beyond legend, they are certainly

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as symbolic as your precious Garcia Lorca's black doves. Lovely young ghost women who lead men to their deaths, they *can* be symbolic of the cruel and implacable forces of nature—the legend was started, you know, by the swamp phosphorescence that led men to their deaths. But I think that you'll get your main clue from Giselle's mother." Here her voice took on a personal intensity that was startling from the usually placid Lyda. "And all you girls—and boys, for that matter—might pay a little attention to it. And those that love only *things*, dancing or money or what have you, *do* lead incomplete lives, and do rest uneasy in their graves." She shot a challenging look around the now large audience that she had gathered. "I guess that's my spooky Slavic background coming out. But in Act Two, when the band of Wilis appears in the graveyard, they are everything that's selfish and alluring and hard in young womanhood. That's why Carmen is so good as the Queen." This was said because Carmen had just entered the circle of listeners, and there was a general laugh at her expense.

"OK," said one of the girls, "I'll buy that. But what about Giselle? She had loved."

"Yes," said Lyda, "but not completely. Remember Albrecht, when he comes to mourn repentant at Giselle's grave, is surrounded by the Wilis, and Giselle is summoned forth by the Queen to dance him literally to death. It is only the power of that love, abortive though it was, that enables her eventually to defy the order and sustain him against the cross of her grave until dawn. I have always felt that when she sinks back into the grave then, she is going to eternal rest and that their final meeting from two sides of the grave gave their love a spiritual climax, as it were, which made it into a whole thing. So, beware, boys and girls, love somebody, or you'll die young and then be condemned to dance away the rest of eternity."

This was perhaps meant facetiously, but it made the chills run down my spine. She seemed so sure of what she was talking about. As she said, it might just be her spooky Slavic ancestry coming out. The whole conversation was a revelation. I had never realized that Lyda had given so much thought or done so much research on the role. Though heaven knows, her performance showed it. The happy girl in love of the first act was immensely appealing, and the wraith Wili of the second was like a mist drifting across the stage.

But, oh, that night in Philadelphia! Lyda walked through the role—no, even worse, she dragged through it. And the kids, unnerved by this unprecedented behavior, were all thrown. One hap-

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py Rhineland lad dropped his basket of grapes, which didn't help anybody's footing. Several of the Wilis got into an all too material tangle, and Carmen, who might have saved the show dancing the Queen, proceeded to get her veil wrapped around a gravestone early in the second act.

After the performance, everyone took a quick look at the call board to see when rehearsals began in New York and crept quietly out of town.

During pre-rehearsal production meetings and during the rehearsal period in New York, things were both worse and better. On one hand, in rehearsal Lyda danced better than she had ever danced before. That performance in Philadelphia had showed her that she could give a bad performance, and it scared her. Word *had* gotten around. On the other hand, I heard via the grapevine (whose name was Carmen) that she had been given an ultimatum—if she danced the New York season, the engagement was broken. Carmen really didn't spread this indiscriminately; she had told only Vivien, Tom and me so that we could be prepared for anything. We were dancing *Giselle* opening night, so we made sure that Pat Morton, one of the promising younger soloists, was constantly on hand to understudy. This gave rise to a good many rumors.

"Benjie, I hear that Lyda will not dance opening night," Ronny said. "Will I be expected to partner that cow, Pat Morton?" (He always said this about any partner except Lyda, which had brought on some spectacular repercussions from Carmen.)

"Ronny, you know that your partnering can make anybody look good." No use alienating everybody, you hypocritical fink, I said to myself.

Through all this, Lyda had not said a word. She seemed to take it for granted that *we* took it for granted that she would dance. And nobody had the guts to pin her down.

The day of opening night was rehearsal as usual. I don't remember what kind of day it was outside, but it was certainly cloudy in the opera house. It was not the kind of gloom that you feel in the theater when you know that you are going to lay a big fat egg. This was blacker and stranger and not to be analyzed. Everyone felt it, even the rawest of the corps, and yet rehearsal went smoothly.

"Lyda is too calm," Carmen said. "I know nothing has changed, and she isn't showing a thing. Benjie, I'm afraid. Everything is wrong. One of the kids whistled in the dressing room today. I almost slapped her." She shivered.

"Hold *on*, Carmen," I said. "You are about all that's holding the company together as it is."

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"I don't know that I can much longer. I mean it. Something awful is going to happen."

With that cheerful thought, I went home and changed, ate a quick meal, and hurried back to the opera house.

My favorite moment wasn't so hot that night. Lord, that theater was dark, and it wasn't just because the only light was the worklight. The darkness was gathered in folds up in those flies and looked ready to drop, like a huge black velvet curtain. And when I turned and saw someone watching me from the wings, I barely suppressed a jump that Ronny would have envied.

I realized that it was Lyda. "You're early. We're doing *Promenade* first on the bill, you know," I said idiotically, knowing full well she knew.

"I just wanted to be here," she said. "And, Benjie . . . I wanted to ask you a favor. Mr. Peters may . . . will be here this evening. It will be all right if he's in my dressing room. I promise you that nothing will happen."

"It's OK with me, Lyda. I can't speak for Vivien, though."

"Oh, don't worry about her. She's too afraid of my leaving to want to 'upset' me."

Two of the corps scurried in, looked up into the flies as if they thought there were vultures in them and ran for their dressing rooms.

"Well, Lyda," I said awkwardly, "if I don't get a chance before you go on, *merde* for the performance." You say this to a dancer if you don't feel close enough to them to give them a boot. Wishing a dancer *good* luck is very bad luck, if you see what I mean.

"Thank you, Benjie," and she went toward her dressing room.

Promenade went brilliantly. I had watched it from the back of the house, and I slipped backstage before Act I of *Giselle* with the favorable comments of intermission ringing in my ears. I was met by Carmen, already in her Queen of the Wilis costume, though she wasn't on until the second act. "That bastard! That bastard! I swear I'll kill him if I see him!"

"What the hell has happened?" I asked, having a good idea.

"That Peters! That . . . that . . ." going off into a string of Russian. "He couldn't even come. He just sent a note saying, "Sorry. It's all off. We'd never have worked."

"How is she taking it?"

"Too well. She hasn't said a word. Just put on her makeup after showing me the note. I wish to God she *were* having hysterics!"

"Do you think that we should get Pat ready just in case?"

This was solved for me by the approach of Lyda, looking so beautifully poised that you almost missed the terrifying effort behind it, and Vivien, with the look of a woman carrying a bomb

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that she was sure would go off at any moment. Lyda went past us and I heard her ask Tom if we could start the minute that everything was ready. Vivien paused by us. "My dears, I think that she's going to take it well."

"I hope so. I really hope so," Carmen said grimly. "But I hope it for her sake, not the company's."

Vivien was deciding whether to take offense at this when Tom called places. I slipped outside again, praying steadily. The overture was played, the curtain went up on Giselle's cottage. Ronny, as Albrecht, came on and knocked at the door, then hid around the corner. The door opened and Lyda appeared. Just for a moment she faltered, when the lights hit her. Then the famous smile appeared and I cried—not for the last time that night. She was *so* beautiful, this girl in love, so limpid, so innocent. The stereotyped play suddenly was everyone's private love memories, and even familiar Ronny became the lover of every girl's dreams, simply because he was favored with that smile. The act proceeded with increasing enchantment. This *was* Giselle, this lovely girl that loved so to dance.

And when the betrayal came, I felt it with her. All the horror and sorrow and anger poured out of her, and I realized that it was Lyda I was watching now, dancing herself. And she brought down the blackness that was lurking in the flies and spread it to the audience, and when she picked up the sword that had given the deception away, you could hear the audience's intake of breath as one, and when she fell on it, a collective moan. The curtain fell and the applause, when it had the strength to come, was almost tentative. This audience, for the most part familiar with Giselle, was certainly not used to having her brought to life and then killed before their eyes, and they were not at all sure that they liked having their composure upset.

As for me, I raced back, half convinced that she had hurt herself on that phony sword.

I grabbed Carmen. "Is she all right?"

Carmen looked as shaken as I felt. "I guess so," she said. "She got up and walked into the dressing room. And she's locked the door. She won't answer me when I call at it."

We looked at each other. "Just in case," I said slowly, "just in case, I'd better tell Pat to get into the Wili costme."

For that endless fifteen-minute intermission, Lyda did not come out, nor would she unlock the door, or answer a call. After conferences with Tom and Vivien, we decided that we dared not hold the curtain any longer and warned Pat that she would be doing the second act. Tom would make the announcement over the house

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mike just after lowering the lights. Much as I hated to, I went out front again, as it was part of my duty to check every understudy's performance from there.

The lights lowered, and then to my surprise, the second act overture began. Tom had made no announcement—I couldn't think why. Oh, well, to hell with it—half the audience wouldn't know the difference, and the other half would be too busy trying to think who the understudy could be to complain.

The curtain rose on the Gothic graveyard. Even with my mind on Lyda, I can remember thinking that Tom had done something to the lights, though I realized a second later that no light board that I knew of was capable of the effect I was seeing. It was indescribable. An unhealthy greenish murk that had the quality of not obscuring, but slightly distorting. One expected to see these unhealthy miasmas start to drift across the footlights at any moment, and you knew that if they did, you would do anything to keep them from touching you.

Lights began to drift through the unclean air, brighter and brighter, and when the dazzled eye adjusted to them, there were the Wilis in their lines, still as death, but poised, waiting. There were all the girls I knew; I had worked with them daily for months, but my God, what a change! They moved as one mindless automaton, possessed. Carmen appeared, the Queen, the genius of the band. She too, looked like a demon possessed, and danced like one. But I knew Carmen well enough to know also that she was frightened, that something was driving her to dance as she had never danced, and she was terrified of it. Arthur appeared, dancing Hilarion, the villain of the piece. The Wili closed on him and dazzling him, confusing him, led him into the lake to drown. I knew it was a painted lake, but I felt, suddenly, that I might never see him again.

Then Albrecht appeared, the repentant lover. The Wilis paused and the Queen gestured with her wand. The scene froze. Then Giselle rose from her tomb—and it was Lyda! She simply appeared—she did not step out, or leap on, or appear from behind a scrim. She rose from that painted grave, and I knew that there was no trap in that stage.

After that first moment, she was in constant motion. There is no use in trying to describe that dancing; people have described Lyda's *Giselle* as mist moving on stage, but even Lyda had never moved like this. When Ronny lifted her, it seemed less as if he were holding her up than keeping her down, and at one point, I swear I saw his hand go right *through* her.

The end came. The cock crows.

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The Queen and her maidens exit slowly, and Giselle, with a glance of hopeless love and farewell, sinks back into her tomb. I was sobbing uncontrollably; she was lost, gone. The curtain fell.

I had, at other times, known that pause of a stunned audience before it collects its wits to applaud. This time the pause was nearly a full minute, a lifetime to the ever restless theater. Then it started—and such a noise I hope never to hear again in my lifetime. I can't believe that the sound of two hands hitting each other could have such overtones of hysteria.

The curtain did not rise again. There were no bows, not for Lyda, or the soloists, or the corps. I pulled myself together and raced backstage.

It was as silent as the—I won't say it. The stagehands were not striking the sets. The stage lights were off, and only that miserable little worklight was on, showing the dancers huddled in groups, all looking dazed. I saw Pat.

"What on Earth happened?" I said. "Why didn't you go on?"

"I was all ready to," she answered. "I was standing there in the wings, waiting. Suddenly I felt cold. I looked up and there was Lyda, in costume. She just looked at me, and I—I moved aside."

"Did you see the performance?" I asked.

"God, yes!" she said. "I still don't believe what I saw."

Ronny came up to us. I thought that he was going to be sick, right there. "I didn't touch her," he whimpered. "Not once. I lifted her and there was no weight. What was I dancing with?"

I saw Carmen then. She, at least, had control of herself, though it was with difficulty. She came to me and leaned on me. I felt her trembling.

"I will never dance that ballet again," she said. "Her door is still locked. It has not been opened. I know."

When we did get it open, after a few minutes of effort, we found Lyda's body still in the first act costume. She had killed herself with a dagger fashioned like a miniature sword. The house doctor said she had been dead at least an hour when we found her.

The newspapers said only that she had killed herself after the performance. The critics said that she gave the greatest performance of Giselle ever seen. The company, up 'til now, has not said a word.

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Dr. Tushnet's latest story begins—as have many memorable fantasies—in an offbeat shop on a sidestreet in a rundown neighborhood. Both the proprietor and the merchandise are appropriately peculiar, but we have never known a customer to be deterred by such strangeness, and Morris Greenstein, wholesaler of gifts, is happily no exception.

GIFTS FROM THE UNIVERSE

by Leonard Tushnet

THAT SAYING, "THERE'S NO BUSiness like show business," is all wrong. There's no business like the gift business. You have to figure out in advance what the public is likely to take to, how to set a low enough price and yet make a profit, and most important, be the first with the most of what's new or going to be new.

Furthermore, gifts aren't staples like hosiery or underwear. You never know what's going to catch on. Take delft ware, for instance. One year there's a real craze for it, and you stock up with teapots and pitchers and platters, and six months later you can't give them away. The same with giant pepper mills or Indian temple bells. Or you get a good buy and you figure you'll introduce carved Shesham wood chests, perfect for gifts, and nobody looks at them. I tell you, in this business you got to be on your toes, especially wholesaling, which is what I do.

That's why, when I saw the sign GIFTS FROM THE UNIVERSE where the vacant store was on Elm Street for a year, I went in. Just to add a customer, so to speak, and to find out why anybody in his right mind would open a store on a side street in a rundown neighborhood.

There was the usual junk in the windows: fake porcelain cups and saucers, majolica-like candlesticks, low-grade colored glass. But inside! Wow! You walk on a thick red pile carpet into a showroom shimmering with diffused light from crystal sconces set all around, and the walls have heavy red drapes. A place like that is decorated for a

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chichi store on Madison Avenue, not for Elm Street in New Falls.

And the showcases! Sure, one tall, open glass case shows the cheap items, but then all the others are polished cabinets with heavy plate glass and inside them are things of such beauty you catch your breath at them. Iridescent vases with raised designs, not Tiffany, but better. Polychrome glazed bowls no Japanese could improve on. Nested china boxes with fine geometric decorations. What's the use of going on? Believe me, and I should know, being in this business so many years, the place was full of pieces that belonged in art museums.

I just looked around, my mouth open. Where the owner of this store got such merchandise, I couldn't figure out. Certainly not from the usual outlets. I go to all the trade shows and nowhere did I see stuff like this. He had a source I didn't know about, and naturally, at that thought, I got interested.

A little man came out of the door leading to the back. He looked very ordinary, in his late forties, somewhat bald, paunchy, stoop-shouldered, with thick eyeglasses and a poker face with the unhealthy pallor of a storekeeper. The only thing unusual about him was his hands; he was wearing flesh-colored gloves. I figured he was polishing something in the back of the store.

I handed him my card—MORRIS GREENSTEIN. GIFTS FOR THE TRADE—and introduced myself.

He was very affable until he understood I was a seller, not a buyer.

"You have some nice stuff here," I said. "Do you mind telling me where you got this?"—an enameled glass apothecary jar—"or this?"—a multicolored faceted paper weight.

He stiffened. "I am an importer. I bring in my own goods."

"No reason to get sore," I said. "I'm not a competitor of yours. But isn't this merchandise too expensive to sell around here?"

"Is it?" he asked, somewhat surprised. "I thought the prices were low enough for any market. I checked around before I put the things out." He opened a cabinet and took out a rope-style cachepot and handed it to me. It looked sturdy, but I was unprepared for its lightness and I almost dropped it. It was as delicate as Belleek china.

"That's fifty cents."

I thought he was a wise guy. "Fifty cents? You mean fifty dollars."

He shook his head. "No. Fifty cents."

What kind of a nut was this? Even if he paid the factory in Baluchistan (or wherever the workers get only a dollar a month) a quarter apiece for the pots, the transportation and duty alone would increase the cost. "What are your other prices?" I asked.

He was a nut, all right, all right. Nothing on display was priced at

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more than fifty cents; some items were a quarter. Nut or no nut, business is business. I took all the bills out of my wallet, leaving myself only a dollar, and said I'd buy whatever he had for whatever I had, which amounted to eighty-three dollars.

The way some people do business you could plotz. No wonder there are so many bankruptcies. He looked at the bills and said, "I'm sorry, but I take silver only."

The only way I could figure out such a *meshugas* is that he came from a country where there was inflation, although I must say he spoke English as good as you or I. "The American dollar is sound as —as—as a dollar." I made a joke.

He just stood there and said no. "I will take only silver."

"So pack up the stuff and I'll go get silver," I said. "The bank's only six blocks away. I'll be right back."

I came back with a bag full of rolls of quarters. You know what he did? He unwrapped every roll and felt and looked at every quarter! He made two piles on the counter in the rear, one small and one large. He pushed the larger pile back to me. "These are not all silver," he said. He counted out the other pile. "Sixteen dollars and seventy-five cents. Pick out what you want, and I'll put it in a carton for you."

There was no use arguing with him, I found out. Of course most of the quarters were this new sandwich type, you know, because of the silver shortage, but I couldn't convince him that they were legal tender just the same. In the end I bought the cachepot and a lot of other single items. That's another thing, he had only one of a kind of everything, but he assured me he could get me as many of any item as I wanted. For silver, of course, only for silver.

He got me so worked up that I stumbled on the sill going out. I fell with the carton. The end of my investment, I thought, and opened it up to see what could be salvaged. Would you believe it? Not a thing was broken!

The man—his name was Peter Tolliver, he said, but I had my doubts about that—helped me brush myself off. When I remarked how lucky I was that nothing broke, he said, "None of that is breakable. Watch." Before I could stop him, he took that beautiful fragile cachepot and dropped it on the sidewalk. It bounced! It actually bounced! "All my merchandise is indestructible," he told me, "unless exposed to strong sunlight. That's why it's kept behind glass, away from ultraviolet light."

Bargains or no bargains, I left there quick. You never can tell with a lunatic what he'll do next. I drove right down to Strauss's department store on Broad Street and saw the gift boutique buyer. She drooled when she inspected the china boxes and almost fainted when I told her

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the price. I figured if Tolliver was crazy, I wasn't. I sold her every one of the "samples" for ten dollars each, and she gave me a whopping order.

My problem was how to get enough silver for that crackpot. I took the loose quarters I had in the bag to the bank across the street and asked for rolls of quarters. The teller put them in the coin counter and wanted to give them back to me all wrapped up again. When I said I had to have other rolls of quarters, he looked at me sort of funny, shrugged, and gave me them. I could see him pointing me out to another teller and laughing as I went out. Let them laugh, I thought.

I went to my place of business and opened the rolls of quarters. Out of the packed sixty-five dollars there was only twelve dollars in all-silver quarters. I rewrapped fifty dollars and sent the errand boy to the bank, together with a check for a hundred dollars, and told him to bring back only quarters and half dollars and to make sure the quarters were different from the ones I was sending. You know what? Not one single silver half dollar in that whole pile he brought back! And only seventeen silver quarters!

I took the $16.25 I had and went back to Tolliver's. He was glad to see me, and gladder to see the money. I picked out what I wanted and gave him the order I got from Strauss's. He almost danced with joy. I held up my finger to him. "Now, remember, I want delivery on this, so give me a date, and no kibitzing."

He became very businesslike. "Mr. Greenstein, I assure you that tomorrow morning you can pick up your merchandise. Cash on delivery, of course. Silver."

"You crazy?" I hollered. "I'll give you a check if you don't want to extend credit. Go tell the bank when you cash it, you want silver, not me! I'm a merchant, not a money changer!"

His eyes glittered behind the glasses. "Sorry, Mr. Greenstein, but we can't trade except on my terms."

What could a person do with such an idiot? And promising me the goods tomorrow yet! I gave in. I surrendered. "Okay, Tolliver. But where I'll get so many quarters, I don't know."

I took the carton with me to Beau Mode, which is a very fashionable gift shop in Homestead. I didn't do like at Strauss's. Some items I put on a price of thirty dollars, some twelve, some twenty-two, just to make things look reasonable. Mrs. Dawson, the la-di-da lady who runs the place, didn't bat an eyelash. She bought all the samples on the spot and asked for more. I told her I was expecting other *objets d'art* and I'd give her an exclusive for Homestead if her order was large enough. She was cagey but finally agreed.

I went to the Homestead bank,

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got twenty dollars worth of quarters, and went home. I was busting with aggravation. I told Sadie, my wife, "Here I got a supply source every buyer in New Jersey—New York, even—will have their tongues hanging out for my merchandise, and I've got to start looking for silver quarters right when the government stops making them on account of the silver shortage." I told her the whole story.

"So take that pile of silver dollars you've been saving from the time we went to Las Vegas," she said. "You must have sixty dollars there, at least. And I'll go with you. There's something fishy about this whole deal."

Again I go, this time with Sadie, to the store on Elm Street. Tolliver was putting new pieces in the cabinets, and one was more exquisite than the other. Sadie, who knows about such things (she helped me in the business when I got started), was speechless. Heavy terra cotta book ends with allover tiny designs, a glass cheese server that looked like it was made out of lace, painted china fruit bowls you could see through—who can tell you what marvels he had there?

I gave Tolliver the silver dollars and the few silver quarters I had. He counted them out one by one, and Sadie selected what I'd get for them. All the time she was looking the place over. When I pushed him again to take a check and he said no, Sadie butted in. "Enough, Morris. We'll talk this over." She smiled at Tolliver. "Mr. Tolliver, if we contract to buy all your stock, how much do you think it will amount to?"

"I have on hand goods priced at exactly $524.50," he answered. "But you understand that these are only samples, and I can furnish any amount of any item in twenty-four hours."

I almost exploded. Goods he had there worth thousands, and yet he had his inventory figured out down to the penny. And where, I asked Sadie, would I get $524.50 worth of quarters?

She didn't answer me and she didn't say anything on the way home. She was quiet. She was thinking. After supper she took out what we'd bought and looked at each piece top to bottom, inside and out, side to side. One thing you got to say about Sadie—she's no dope. She asked me, "How long has this store been there?"

"It just opened today, I ride down Elm Street every day, you know, and it wasn't open yesterday."

"That Tolliver is a sick man. He breathes too fast, and there must be something wrong with his hands; he's always wearing the gloves."

I hadn't noticed the breathing, but now that Sadie mentioned it, I realized that she was right. "That reminds me," I said, "now you say he's sick. There's a peculiar smell in that place like when Uncle Artie

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was dying of cancer (may he rest in peace!) and Aunt Bertha had to have an ozone deodorizer in his room."

"Also, there are no country of origin markings on anything, which means either he makes those things himself or he has them made by some small local outfit right around here. That's why they're so cheap and he can get them so fast. Imports they're not, that you can be sure of."

"But he said he brings them in himself," I argued.

"He's a liar," Sadie said flatly. "The prices are so low that even smuggling them in from China wouldn't pay. Furthermore, did you notice that there isn't even one piece of metalwork in that whole store, not a trivet, not a candelabrum, not a frame? No brass, no tin, no iron. Also—there are no animal knickknacks. You know what I mean—china dogs or wooden deer. And not one of the bisque ballet dancers that are so popular now. Like the Mohammedans, no graven images of anything alive. And the silver. Why does he want only silver?"

That last was a very practical problem for me. I would have been willing to buy out his entire stock and give him orders for more goods, only where would I get that much silver? Sadie had the answer. "He wants silver. He doesn't care if it's coined or not. Take the silver candlesticks from the dining room, and the sterling platter the lodge gave you, and the silver goblet from the Passover set, and the salad serving fork and spoon we bought in Mexico, and your cuff links, and my Navajo bracelet, and the silver frame from the picture on the dresser. I bet you he'll take every one of those things the same as money."

I felt like a junkman or a burglar the next morning, carrying a pillowcase filled with as much silver as we had in the house or as I was willing to part with. I came into Tolliver's store and dropped the clanking bundle on the counter. Sadie was right. He had no objection to silver in any form. Also she was right about him being sick. He looked paler than yesterday and breathed faster; his hands shook when he took out the platter, and he staggered a little when he walked over to show me Strauss's order neatly packed.

He took all the silver into the back room "to weigh it," he said, and came out again with a slip of paper. "At current rates for silver," he told me, "that amounts to $440, which more than covers your orders from yesterday but is still insufficient for my stock."

I looked around. Again there were new things in the cabinets: prism-cut glass decanters, opalescent oil and vinegar cruets, mosaic ashtrays, alabaster tumblers, and every piece tasteful and pretty. I made a rapid calculation. "Okay,"

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I said. "I'll send the truck up for the order, and I'll send with it a thousand dollars in sterling silverware. You get everything ready for the truck to pick up." You see, I trusted him. What was going on I didn't know, but I got an eye for faces and I could tell he was honest.

I went to Walsh the jeweler (he's a cousin, you'd never guess from the name) and negotiated with him. For only ten percent markup I got my thousand dollars worth of silver. When the truck returned, everybody in the place watched it being unpacked. "High class, very high class," Miss Atkins my secretary said. And Herman, the bookkeeper, who's forever taking courses in college at night, he said, "Don't be in a hurry to sell all this, Mr. Greenstein. Have a private showing first for the better shops and take orders. Tiffany's doesn't have better."

Naturally, Sadie said I did the smart thing by buying like I did. She had another suggestion to make. "Why not tell Tolliver to close up that store of his and guarantee him an outlet for everything he can get? You can't go wrong."

So next day after her beauty parlor appointment, Sadie met me and we went to Tolliver's. The smell of ozone was stronger in the store, like after a thunderstorm. The cabinets were full again with elegant gifts, but there was no time to check them. Tolliver came tottering out of the back room and stood leaning on the counter for support. He looked paler and more shrunken; even his gloves hung loose on his hands. Sadie, good heart that she is, ran to him. "Mr. Tolliver! You're sick! I'm going to call a doctor. Where's your family? Where do you live? We'll take you home."

Tolliver shook his head feebly. "I live here. I have no family. I don't need a doctor."

"Nonsense! Let me see your tongue," Sadie ordered, just like she used to do with the children when they were little. "Let me feel your head." she made him sit down. "Tsk-tsk! I was right. You have a high fever. Morris, help him out to the car. Give me the keys, Mr. Tolliver. I'll lock up."

He protested, but who can win against my Sadie? We drove him home and Sadie put him to bed in Carl's room—he's away to college. She came downstairs looking very strange and got busy in the kitchen. "Go to work, Morris," she told me. "I'll take care of him." She wouldn't let me help her. She carried the tray with the toast, a soft-boiled egg, and hot milk with butter, her favorite remedy, upstairs by herself.

When I came home after a very busy day because by now the word had got around that I had a spectacular line and the phone was busy with calls from even big-name buyers, Sadie gave me supper, including chicken soup, unusual for a Thursday. She was acting myste-

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rious and refused to talk about Tolliver until after I finished my tea and cake. Then she made me sit down in the living room, and she told me, "Mr. Tolliver is very sick. He is going to die."

I jumped out of the chair. "Not here! Get him to a hospital!" I yelled. A perfect stranger to die in your house, you know how you'd feel."

She pushed me back. "Now listen, Morris, and keep quiet. Remember something at least from your Bar Mitzvah. Three things assure your place in Paradise—helping the stranger, tending the sick, and burying the dead. This is a complicated case. You do just like I say and don't ask questions. Upstairs is a hero, a very brave and good man, and he deserves the best you can do for him. Later, when it gets dark so the neighbors won't see, you'll carry him down to the car. I'll go with you and we'll bring him back to the store. There he'll die, and we'll do the rest."

Now I was shocked. My sweet Sadie to be so hard-hearted as to turn a dying person out of the house! But she had an answer. "Wait. There's a reason. When I undressed Tolliver to put him to bed, I saw. He is not a human being. He is very much different from us. That face is a plastic mask. He told me, while he could—"

"What do you mean—while he could?" I shouted. "He's already dead?"

"No, he's now in a coma," she answered. "He has what I suppose we'd call a cancer. He called it something else, but it acts the same. Where he's from—from what I could gather it's deep in the ground in the planet Venus—it's almost an epidemic. But they've got a simple cure for it, which is more than we have, only they need silver to make the cure, and their silver is rarer than by us uranium. Furthermore, they can't change another element into it for some reason. He explained, but I couldn't understand. So he volunteered to come here."

"How? A flying saucer?" The whole story was ridiculous.

"No. They've got what they call teleportation. They put an object in a chamber, and the atoms fall apart, and they re-assemble them where they want the object to be. Tolliver came here a month ago with six companions—they're all dead now—on a mission to get silver. Not to steal it—they have strong ethics—but to get it by trade, and at the same time not to upset Earth economy. So they looked around and decided on the gift business because it's not very essential and yet it makes money."

"Not one word do I believe!" I said. I was sore how calm she said the gift business was like a nothing and all the time families like ours live from it. "If the Venus people are so smart and so ethical, why didn't they send delegates to Wash-

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ington to the President? He'd give them all the silver they'd want in exchange for a few secrets. Like this teleportation."

She sighed. "That's just the trouble. They've been watching us for a long time. They don't trust us, or the Russians, or the Chinese, not even the Israelis. They feel that already we're about to destroy this whole planet with what we know already, so why should they hasten the process? Trade on the q.t. was better, they thought."

"So why did they send a sick man?" I asked.

Tears filled Sadie's eyes. "That's why I said he's a hero. Teleportation is fine for dead things, but for living things it shortens the life. Tolliver knew that he was going to die in a year or two anyway, so he volunteered. The others the same, but he was the strongest and lived the longest. They were pioneers. If their mission was successful and they sent back enough silver, more would come from Venus, and they'd open stores and sell for silver. Ceramics they're very good at. You saw."

"But meanwhile what about Tolliver? Why can't we send him back home wherever he came from by the same method?"

"Because it's very painful. No, we'll do like he says. I wrote everything down." She showed me a paper. "About the store—the landlord knows it was only for a month tenancy and the rent's paid. He says we could have the fixtures and whatever's left in the store." Up to now her voice was steady, but all of a sudden she started crying. "Oh, Morris, if only we could send some silver back with him! All those poor people dying of cancer and we could help!"

You know, one word from my Sadie and I'm on the go. In the next two hours I went from relative to relative, to friends and acquaintances, buying up all the silver they'd give me, paying anything they asked, just to make Sadie happy. They couldn't understand what I wanted the silver for, and I couldn't explain.

When I got back, Tolliver wasn't dead, but he was as good as. He was unconscious, breathing very fast, hot as an oven, when I carried him down. The back room of the store had nothing in it but a big box (like a coffin, I thought) with wires and tubes going every which way out of it like a Rube Goldberg invention into another box alongside of it. By the time we put Tolliver in the box with the silver, he wasn't breathing any more. Out of respect I said Kaddish for him, and we set the dials according to the paper Sadie had. There were symbols, not numbers, on the dials, and one of them, Sadie said, meant Final Return. We turned the handle, and we went out into the store like he said to do.

In a couple of minutes we heard a faint whirr, and the ozone smell

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got very strong. The floor shook a little with vibration, and then everything was quiet again. We went into the back room. Everything was gone, including the smaller box. The room was bare.

There's more to the story. That afternoon I had my delivery man disconnect the crystal sconces and take down the drapes. I helped him carry out the fixtures and the two cartons that were left. I unpacked the cartons in my place and found more bowls and vases. I put them in a cabinet in my showroom; they were there only two days before a buyer from Dallas took them at a hundred dollars each. One thing I kept for Sadie: an epergne of violet glass with such finely etched lines for decoration that it almost shone in the dark. You know what Sadie did? She put it in a closet for when my daughter would get married.

It was just as well. About six months later I got a complaint from Strauss's buyer. She took one of the cachepots for herself and put it outside on her porch for a week. When she touched it then, it crumbled, almost like the spun sugar houses on fancy cakes. A couple of other customers said that after a week of sunlight whatever was exposed to it became very fragile. Tolliver warned me about that, so I passed on the word to the buyers. "This is for show only, in a cabinet with glass doors. Don't let the sunlight hit it."

Sadie, when she heard about how the stuff changed, made me give the epergne to the New Falls Museum. They took it gladly. It's there now on the first floor with a card: GLASS EPERGNE—MODERN. ENGRAVED. ARTIST UNKNOWN. DONATED BY MR. AND MRS. MORRIS GREENSTEIN. Can you picture that? Me, Morris Greenstein, a patron of the arts?

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F&SF published nine excellent stories by Vance Aandahl in the period from 1960 to 1964. It is a pleasure to welcome him back with his first appearance since A CROWN OF RANK FUMITER *(Sept. 1964).*

Much imaginative fiction is set on that tenuous borderline between reality and illusion. In the story you are about to read, Mr. Aandahl moves his protagonist across that border; that he also makes you pause and wonder: in what direction? is a tribute to his superior talent.

BEYOND THE GAME

by Vance Aandahl

DRY AND WHITE AS CHALK IN his gym shorts, Ernest crouched under the fat red backs of Balfe and Basil Basset and shivered as the naked bumps of his spine brushed against the wall behind him. He knew from previous games that the twins would be too hysterical to run; for a while, at least, he could hide safely behind them. His fingers trilled against his cheeks.

Staring through the narrow space between Balfe's soft thighs, he could see the boys of the enemy team lined against the far wall. All of them looked tall and lean and hungry for the game: some strutted in place; others contorted their mouths into ravenous grins and shouted threats across the gym. Hunkering down, Ernest laced his slender arms around his slender legs and kissed his knees. His eyes moved to the teacher.

Miss Argentine paused halfway between the two teams and adjusted the canvas bag that dangled from her shoulder like an enormous cocoon. She was walking along the black line that halved the gym, bending after every step to take a ball from the bag and place it on the line. Ernest gazed at the balls. There were basketballs with pebbled rubber skins and footballs of rough leather, smooth white volleyballs that spun when you threw them and furry gray tennis balls that stung when

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they hit, mushy softballs with peeling cases and hard little handballs of solid rubber.

The rules of the game were very simple, and even Ernest knew them. Each team had to stay in its own half of the gym: no one could cross the center line. If someone on the other team hit you with a ball, you were eliminated and had to stand against the side wall; but if you caught the ball without dropping it, then he was eliminated instead. If the ball missed you completely and hit the floor or a wall, then nobody was eliminated. Only when one team had completely wiped out the other did the game end, and rarely were there more than three or four survivors on the winning side.

Miss Argentine set the last ball on the line and retreated to stand with her shoulders against the side wall. An absolute silence filled the gym. She turned her head and looked at Ernest's team. Her face was the color of clouded silver. Her eyes looked like sandpapered zinc. When she spotted Ernest behind the Basset twins, a smile slowly split the stark plane between her nose and jaw, and she lifted a green tin whistle to her mouth and rolled it for a moment on the tip of her tongue. Then her lips hardened.

Suddenly the silence was pierced by the shrill of her whistle.

As Balfe and Basil squeaked and gibbered with excitement, Ernest huddled beneath their ponderous buttocks and watched the game begin. At the sound of the whistle, boys on each team had charged recklessly for the center line. Sprinting hard and fast from the opposite wall, Freddy Guymon and Jim Genz had reached the balls before anyone on Ernest's team was even close. Freddy hit Bobby Graffigna in the knees with a basketball, and Jim hit Ben Lee in the neck with a tennis ball, Gerald Francis in the thigh with a softball, and Rae Stalker in the chest with another softball. The other boys on Ernest's team scrambled back to their wall.

Hooting and yelping their derision, the entire enemy team crowded up to the center line to collect the rest of the balls. They jumped up and down like the naked savages that Ernest conjured up in the dark rain forests of his mind.

"All right, you guys!" Jim Genz lifted a football in his right hand and shook it above his head. "Get ready! Get set! *Give it to 'em!*"

The air thickened with balls. Cowering back against the wall, Ernest watched them in a dream of soft terror: they grew larger and larger as they skirred toward him at incredible speeds, and he could see the dark brown laces on the footballs, the white stitching on the softballs. The horror of waiting seemed to last forever. Then he suddenly realized that it was over and he hadn't been hit.

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Balfe turned slowly to face Ernest. Both of his hands were clamped over his forehead. Two tears slid from the corner of his left eye and rolled across his cheek; another tear fell from his left nostril and splattered on his lips; then his mouth crinkled into fluted pie crust, and he began to sputter and whine and bawl. It must have been one of the handballs; they were hard as ice. His forehead would have a purple welt for days.

"Run, Balfe! Get over to the side wall before she sees you!" Basil shoved his brother frantically. His cheeks reddening with pain, his shoulders shaking with sobs, Balfe waddled away to join the others who had been eliminated.

A ball hurtled against the wall next to Ernest's ear, and he jerked his eyes away from Balfe to stare across the gym. His own team had just barraged the enemy with nine or ten balls, and now snipers on both sides were edging up the sidelines. Loose balls bounced and dribbled and rolled in every direction. Screams of triumph mingled with shrieks of anger. Two basketballs collided in mid-air and bounded through a spray of tennis balls. Ernest curled himself into a tiny knot of flesh, half protected by Basil's calves, and retreated into dazed abstraction: high on the wall above Miss Argentine, the heavy wire mesh that protected the gym's single window was rattling on its loosened screws, and beyond it, distorted by the vibrating glass in the panes, a single updrift of green smoke wavered once, then billowed, then melted into the smog that hung in thick gray curtains over the city. And what color was the sky beyond the smog? Ernest's teachers had said it was blue, but even now he could see tiny diamond-winged angels diving from banks of pearl into the golden rivers of the sun . . .

"Oooooooo . . ."

Basil swayed and sank to one knee. Then he lay over on his side and clutched his groin with both hands. His pudgy fingers fluttered like birds.

"Oooooooo . . ."

Defenseless and exposed, Ernest staggered to his feet and skittered back and forth against the wall, looking for someone to hide behind. But everyone was running now, rushing madly forward to throw a ball, leaping desperately back to duck another, dashing and darting and diving in helter-skelter, skimble-scamble confusion. His head ached from the roar of their voices; his vision spun into a blurred pinwheel of skin and leather, wood and plaster. At last he crouched down in a corner with his back to the game. He squeezed shut his eyes, screwed the butts of his thumbs into his ears to dampen the clamor, and waited in a buzzing trance for a ball to hit his

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back. He hoped only that it would be a volleyball or a tennis ball, not a handball.

And then he saw a slender boy running naked down the grassy slopes, trotting past the palm trees cottony with spiderwebs, jogging into a thicket of emerald ferns and gray sawtooth reeds and nodding white lotus blossoms, and presently he knew that he wasn't just watching the boy, knew that he was the boy himself, that he was actually there, sprawling with arms and legs akimbo beneath a luxurious profusion of chocolate and saffron flowers, panting quickly at the hot pulsing heart of the sun in a sky as white and grainy as the warm sand beneath his shoulders, crawling finally into the zebra-stripe shadows to wait for the bears. . . .and the bears *did* come, lurched one by one out of their secret tunnels into the blinding sunlight, stumbled by giddy threes and fours down to the river shallows, munched the tubers that grew there beneath the water, splashed each other with glassy pawfuls of river, then fell to indolent wrestling in the golden mud —black bears and brown bears, cinnamon bears and honey bears, regal Kodiaks and surly grizzlies, even a family of great white polar bears, their paws batting in bewildered discomfort at the steaming heat of the jungle, their eyes glittering like melting snowcrust . . .

Suddenly Ernest realized that he was wrapped in complete silence. He took his hands away from his ears. The silence persisted, deepened.

Opening his eyes, he turned slowly on his knees and blinked across the gym. They were standing against the side wall—every one of them, and they were all staring at him.

Covering his mouth with his hands, he lifted himself into half a stance and gazed shamefully down at the litter of balls on the floor. How could it have happened? His fingers grew cold as stones against his lips.

No one moved; no one smiled. He prayed desperately for disappearance, for death.

"Look at the pee-wee." Miss Argentine's voice clipped through the silence like a rusty tin-snip. "Hims doesn't want to play. Hims is *frightened.*"

No one laughed.

"But hims will just have to *learn* how to play, won't hims?"

Ernest's cheeks prickled with heat. He tried to take his hands away from his mouth, but he couldn't; he tried to look up at Miss Argentine, but he couldn't.

"All right, the rest of you go stand at the other end of the gym. We're going to play one more game. Yes, *all* of you, at *that* end of the gym, *right* now."

Ernest felt nauseous. The entire class was lining up at the far end

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of the gym; there were so many of them that they had to stand two deep.

He sank to his knees. He could hear the sharp click of her heels as she walked back and forth across the floor. She was picking up the scattered balls and rearranging them along the center line.

He knew then that it couldn't really be happening. It was only a nightmare, only an illusion.

"Is the pee-wee ready? This time hims *has* to play, doesn't hims?"

He finally forced himself to lift his head. She was standing at her customary post against the side wall. Her face was still the color of clouded silver—and her eyes were still as flat and dead as sandpapered zinc. The corners of her mouth curled up into her cheeks, not in a smile, not in an ordinary smile, but rather in a pathic grimace of lust.

Then she lifted the green tin whistle to her lips.

But Ernest wasn't watching her any more. He broke through the contorted metal cage of her face and burned a fiery furrow up the wall and melted the heavy wire mesh and seared through the window in a hiss of smoking glass . . . and suddenly he was far beyond Miss Argentine, far beyond the horrors of the gym, far beyond the thick curtains of smog that hung forever motionless over the city, far beyond the trivial shadows of his nightmare.

He never heard the whistle.

He was swimming in a sea of stars . . .

SF CONVENTIONS

The 11th Annual Lunacon Science Fiction Conference will be held April 20th and 21st, Saturday and Sunday, at the Park-Sheraton Hotel, 56th Street and 7th Avenue, New York City. Donald A. Wollheim will be the guest of honor, and the registration fee will be $2.00. The program will begin at 1 pm Saturday. For further information write: Frank Dietz, Jr., NY SF Society, 1750 Walton Ave., Bronx, N. Y. 10453

The 19th Annual MidWestCon will be held June 28th, 29th and 30th at the North Plaza Motel, 8911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. Registration is $1.00 payable at the Con. For further information contact Lou Tabakow, 3953 St. Johns Terrace, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236.

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Larry Niven, a Hugo award winner last year (for best short story, NEUTRON STAR*), says that he doesn't like to mix his science fiction with fantasy. He has already acquired a reputation as one of the top writers of short sf, and he brings the same vigorous, concise and involving style to his fantasy fiction, whether it be a humorous excursion (e.g.,* THE LONG NIGHT, *March 1967) or the sort of nightmare ride offered below.*

DRY RUN

by Larry Niven

BY HABIT SIMPSON WAS A ONE-handed driver. On this day he drove with both hands wrapped tightly around the wheel, strangling it. He looked straight ahead, down the curving length of the freeway, and he stayed in the right-center lane.

He wanted a cigarette; yet he was almost afraid to let go of the wheel. The air-conditioning nozzles blew icy air up at his face and down at his belt buckle; icy because of the way he was perspiring. He felt the weakness in his bowels, and he cursed silently, trying to relax.

The dog in the trunk—

Too late now, too late to change his mind—

He stabbed a finger at the cigarette lighter, missed—Jesus! He'd only been driving the Buick for five years!—found it and pushed it in. He fumbled a Camel from the central glove compartment, one-handed, without looking. Traffic was not too heavy. It was past seven o'clock, though the July sun was still a falling glory below red streamers of cloud. A few cars had their lights on, unnecessarily. Were the drivers afraid they'd forget later? The cars in this lane were doing sixty to sixty-five. Usually Simpson chose the fast lane. This time was different. No risks today.

Too late now, too late to back out. He wouldn't if he could. He lit the cigarette, dragged, put the

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lighter back, and gripped the wheel again with both hands. The cigarette bent and flattened between his fingers.

Red tail lights. This lane was slowing. He touched the brake with his foot, eased down, harder. Hard! He tried to push the brake through the floor. He stopped a foot behind a vintage Cadillac, and stalled. Simpson swore and turned the ignition hard over. The motor caught instantly.

It didn't matter. Nobody was moving.

Overhead were the swooping concrete noodles of the Santa Monica Freeway ramps. A carpet of cars was stalled underneath, stalled for as far ahead as Simpson could see. Then there was motion in the distance. He waited.

The vintage Cadillac jerked half a car length forward. Simpson followed. Another ripple of motion, another car length forward.

The freeway shouldn't be this crowded. Seven thirty on a week night? He'd picked his time carefully enough. What was happening?

The Cad moved again. Its driver looked back over his shoulder: angry, middle-aged, sweaty and somewhat overweight. He looked like he'd bite anyone who came close enough.

Simpson felt the same way. He eased forward. . . .

Murray Simpson was six inches too tall for the driver's seat of the Buick. He banged his elbows and knees getting in and out. The driver's seat cramped his legs, bending them too far at the knee, even when it was pushed as far back as it would go.

In repose he always looked unhappy. He had that kind of face. His most genuine laughter looked forced. See him now, stalled in a traffic jam on the San Diego Freeway in a car too small for him. Stalled part way through a murder plan which was too complex to begin with. . . .

He looked frantic. His brown eyes blurred; his colorless hair had lost all semblance of civilization. His forgotten cigarette burned threateningly between white knuckles.

Ahead of the blue Cadillac was a Jaguar convertible whose custom paint job glowed with fiery tangerine brilliance. Ahead of that, a long grey anonymous Detroit car with huge delta fins. The grey car was stalled.

Someone behind Simpson was honking madly.

Cars poured into the gap in his lane, the gap ahead of the stalled car.

At Hermosa Beach the red tide was in. Trillions and quadrillions of plankton made a dirty red-and-brown soup of the ocean. By night the breakers glowed with cold blue fire. By night and day, the ocean air stank of too much life.

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In the trunk of the Buick, Simpson's dun-colored Great Dane lay dead with a hole in his head. He was beginning to stiffen.

No room to get out of this lane. Simpson clenched his teeth and clung to his temper. Part of him wanted to stomp on the throttle and swoop out into the next lane, and damn the car that got in his way! But there was Harvey in the trunk, with his head in a Baggy. Simpson lit another cigarette.

What was Janet doing now? Who was she with? Did Simpson know him? No; Janet wasn't stupid, nor was the divorce yet final. Anyone with her now would be female.

Had she missed Harvey yet? Was she searching for him now, wondering how he'd got out, hoping he hadn't reached the street?

How would Janet look in the trunk of the Buick, with her head in a Baggy to hold the blood?

Cars swept by on the left and right, going ten and fifteen miles per hour.

A woman in a peach-colored dress got out of the grey car and opened the hood. She fiddled in the guts of the motor, then got back in. The grey car lurched forward.

She'd fixed it! Amazing!

And the whole lane crawled off at ten miles per hour, southbound on the San Diego Freeway. Toward the beaches. Toward Simpson's tiny house on the Strand at Hermosa Beach.

Driving was torture. Ripples crawled backward along the lines of cars. Some deadhead in front was moving in spurts, and the spurts became waves traveling backward, communicating their motion to every car behind him. Accelerator, brake, accelerator, brake. Brake! Accelerate. Maddeningly slow. There was the car that had blocked the lanes, twisted across the right lanes with its side smashed in, a police car alongside. Now the lanes moved faster.

On Simpson's left they were getting up to speed. Simpson saw a gap. He twisted the wheel, depressed the throttle and looked quickly over his shoulder. Nobody coming . . . he stomped on the throttle and brought his eyes back to the road.

Every car in his lane must have stopped dead the moment he turned his head. His foot was still on the throttle when he hit.

Discontinuity. He knew he was about to crash . . . and he was getting out to look at the damage. He'd bumped his head, and his ribs must have smacked hard into the steering wheel, but he had no trouble walking.

He walked through a nightmare.

The Buick's hood looked like a squashed banana. The fat man in the Cadillac was getting out, rubbing his thick neck, his eyes squinted against pain. Whiplash, thought Simpson, and moved toward him.

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Then the weakness came, and Simpson dropped hard on his knees. The shock should have hurt, but it didn't. "Sorry," Simpson told the man. *Sorry about your car, your neck. . . sorry to be such a fool. Sorry, I feel weak. Sorry.* He fainted.

He knew he had fainted, though he had not felt his chin hit concrete. Now, without transition, he was totally alert. But alert to what?

There was darkness around him, and a lack of sensation. No sound. Nothing to see or feel. No up or down. The position of his body was a mystery. He visualized himself in a hospital bed, his spinal cord severed at the neck, his eyes bandaged. The thought should have frightened him. It didn't.

Once he'd smoked marijuana. It was unplanned. He'd seen some friends smoking a small-bowled cigarette pipe, using a mechanical roller to make their own cigarettes, and curiosity had got the better of him. He remembered the awful taste at the back of his nose and the deep, all-embracing peace and a queer somatic hallucination: the feeling that all the mass of his body had withdrawn into his feet, below a line drawn at the ankles. It seemed that he could lean as far as he liked in any direction, and he would not fall because his center of mass was only an inch above the floor.

The deep peace was the same, but now his body was entirely massless. As before, his memory was unimpaired. The body in the trunk, the crash . . . how, now, could he keep Harvey's death a secret? . . . But it didn't seem to matter.

Suddenly he knew why.

He was dead. Murray Simpson was a dead issue, an embarrassing mass of tissue associated with an embarrassing mass of torn metal. And that didn't matter either.

The voice spoke close in front of him. "That was silly, Simpson."

Simpson tried to move. Massless body? He had no body at all. He was a viewpoint. Blind, motionless, without sensation . . . he waited.

"The worst possible time to die is when you're involved in a murder." There was no character to that voice, no accent, no timbre, no emphasis, no loudness or softness. It was neither sharp nor dull, neither hoarse nor smooth. A voice with no *handle*. Like print in a typewriter, that voice.

Simpson said, "Murder?" To his own horror, his voice was exactly like the other's.

"Do you deny it?"

"I admit to killing a dog. My own dog, Harvey, a Great Dane."

"Not your own. Harvey belonged to you and to Janet Grey Simpson, your wife. Your wife has had possession of Harvey for seven months, ever since the two of you

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separated. Do you deny your intent to commit murder?"

Life after death. Reward and punishment? Simpson said, "I refuse to answer. Are you my judge?"

"No. Another will judge you. I collect only evidence, and you."

Simpson didn't answer. The strange peace was still with him, and he felt that he'd already found the right answer.

"Well, we must find out," said the voiceless voice.

What a weird nightmare, Simpson thought, and tried to pull himself awake. *I dreamed I was in an accident . . . at the worst possible time . . . I'd already killed Harvey . . . poor Harvey. Why would I pick Harvey?* There were voices around him.

Cold reality touched him, icy cold, icy and rough against his cheek. He lay on hard concrete. His chin hurt, and his belly hurt below the edge of his rib cage.

He looked up into the face of a policeman. "Am I dying?"

"Ambulance will be here . . . moment."

The car! Harvey! He tried to say, "What did you do with the car?"

The policeman spoke calmly. ". . . Take it to . . . get it whenever . . . address . . ." His voice faded in and out. And out.

He woke again, thinking, *nightmare!* And again it was too real. There was a cloth under his cheek. Someone had been a good Samaritan.

He asked nobody, "Am I dying?"

"Just take it easy." Two men folded his arms around him and picked him up in a peculiar grip that supported his innards. The pain under his ribs was not great, but it felt unnatural, terrifying.

"I think he could walk himself," said one.

"I don't dare," Simpson got out, trying to convey his fear. *Something broken in my belly or in my skull. Broken, bleeding, slowly bleeding away my life with nothing to show on the outside.* He was convinced he was dying. It was all that remained of a part of the nightmare that he could not visualize at all.

The men put him on a stretcher and unfolded him into prone position. The rest of it was hazy. The ride in the ambulance, the doctor asking him questions, the same questions asked earlier by the police. Questions he answered without thought, almost without memory. He didn't become fully aware until an interne said, "Nothing broken. Just bruises."

Simpson was startled. "Are you sure?"

"Have your own doctor take a look tomorrow. For tonight you'll be all right. No broken bones. Is that the only pain, under your ribs?"

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"My chin hurts."

"Oh, that's just a scrape. Did you faint?"

"Yes."

"Probably got it then. You're lucky, you know. Your spleen is right under those bruised ribs."

"Jesus."

"You think you can get up? Your wife is coming for you."

Janet, coming here? Janet! "I'll take a taxi," said Simpson. He rolled onto his side, sat up on the high operating table and climbed down to the floor, treating himself like a sackful of expensive eggs. "Where did they take my car?"

"The police gave me the address." The man tapped his pockets. One crackled. "Here."

Simpson took the slip, looked at it and shoved it in his pocket. There was a chance he could get the car transferred to his own company before the police looked in the trunk. Or was there? They might have looked already.

What would the police do about a Great Dane with a bullet in his head? Undoubtedly they'd tell Janet. He must get the car tomorrow.

The interne showed him to a telephone and loaned him a cigarette. After he called the cab, someone else showed him where to wait. He'd waited five minutes when Janet came.

Her hair was back to auburn. The dress she wore was severe, almost a suit, and it was new. She looked competent and sure of herself.

"How did you know?" he asked her.

"How do you think? The police called my house. They must have found the number on your license, if you didn't tell them."

"I've got a taxi coming."

"Let it come. You're going with me. How did you manage to bang yourself up?"

"There was a traffic jam. I got—"

"Can you stand up?"

She was always interrupting. Once he'd thought she did it deliberately. Once she had, perhaps, but now it was a habit she'd never lose.

He stood. The pain under his ribs made him walk carefully. He dreaded what it would feel like tomorrow.

"I'll take you to the beach," she said.

"Okay."

He lived in the beach house now. Janet had been awarded the main house.

He reached the car by leaning on Janet's shoulder. The touch of her was disturbing, and her perfume roused sharp memories. Aside from premarital prostitutes, he had never carnally known a woman other than Janet. Now she distracted him, and he kept landing hard on his feet and jarring his ribs. But her strength was an asset

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in settling him into the seat.

"Now. How did it happen?"

He told her, in detail. Reaction made him want to babble. Somehow he managed to leave the dog out of it. But he told her how sure he had been that he was going to die, and he spoke of his surprise when the interne told him he wasn't. By the time he finished they were back on the freeway.

The lights, the flying lights. . . . He planted his feet and tried to push himself through the seat. Janet didn't notice.

"Harvey's missing," she said.

He should have said, "Oh?"

Instead, he stopped with the word on his lips. He had suddenly realized that it didn't matter. It hadn't mattered since the accident.

"I killed Harvey," he said.

She glanced across at him, with distaste. She didn't believe him.

"He's in the trunk of my car. That's why I was in such a hurry."

"That's ridiculous. You *like* Harvey."

"It was a sort of dry run. I was planning to kill you."

"I don't understand."

"I had it all planned out," he said. "There's a red tide down at the beach. Maybe you knew."

"No." She was beginning to believe him, he thought.

"At night it's lovely. The breakers glow like blue fire. In the daytime it stinks, and the water's filthy. I could bury a body anywhere on the beach, and nobody would notice the smell. But I had to know I could go through with it. Wouldn't I be seven kinds of idiot if I murdered you and then froze?"

"Yes," she said, very coldly.

"So I went up to the house and shot Harvey. It was sort of a dry run. If it had worked, you would have been next. The gun in the pillow, the drive to the beach,—"

"What an idiotic idea. Didn't it occur to you that they'd search harder for a missing woman than a missing dog?"

"Well—"

"And why Harvey? Why not pick up a dog at the pound? Suppose they were searching for my body on the beach and found Harvey's instead. They'd trace him straight to you! Then they'd know they were on the right track!"

"I—"

"I suppose you planned to use the same gun on us both?"

"Yes, I did, as a—"

"And how long do you think a red tide lasts, anyway?"

"The ocean always stinks. There's always a breeze, too."

"Remember the seal that washed up last year? It probably weighed less than seventy pounds. Remember the smell? Think how much worse—"

"All right! It was a stupid plan!"

The angry silence was very, very familiar. It didn't help Simpson to know that his wife was probably right. It never had. They turned toward the beach. Janet asked,

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"Why would you want to kill me?"

"The alimony's bleeding me white."

"That's all?"

"No. Personal reasons."

She laughed. He had wondered before: was her laughter always scornful, or did it only sound that way? "My God, Murray! Surely you can tell me, your intended victim!" She sobered suddenly. "Never mind. I don't want to know why. Do you still plan to kill me?"

"No. Not after that."

"The accident?"

"Of course. I don't have the nerve. Suppose I . . . did it, and then froze up? My car's in a police lot with a dog's body in the trunk. Well, that won't get me killed. But suppose it was you?"

"That's almost funny," she said. "Want a real laugh? I may never drive the freeway again, either. I was so *sure* I was dying."

"I think I'd better tell someone else about this conversation, just in case."

"Go ahead then," said Simpson. And he had an odd thought: this was his last chance to go through with it. Before she told someone.

And then, an odder thought. Her tone: too light. She still didn't believe him. He was beginning to doubt it himself. Had he really intended to kill Janet?

She'd hurt him badly by leaving him: she, the only woman for Murray Simpson. She might as well have taken his testicles along. And he wanted to hurt her, badly.

They had reached the house. Janet pulled into the garage and shut off the ignition. "Do you always leave the door open?"

"Sometimes I forget."

Very uncomfortably, Janet asked, "Shall I come in and make you some coffee?"

"No. No, thanks." Simpson opened the door and got out.

And felt it end.

Deep peace. Massless body, without sensation. The darkness of the blind.

Simpson said, "What happened?"

"You didn't kill her," said the voice without character.

"No, of course not. Am I dead again?"

"You are dead, still."

"How?"

"Loss of blood through a ruptured spleen, symptoms masked by shock. Your most recent memories were a dry run. Simpson, you did not kill your wife."

With abstracted logic, Simpson said, "But I would have, if there hadn't been an accident."

"That is debatable. In any case, it was your own accident. You caused it without help."

"Deliberately?" Simpson didn't know.

"Your judge will decide. Shall we go?"

"Yes."

They went. ◄

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SCIENCE

BACKWARD, TURN BACKWARD—

by Isaac Asimov

I RARELY TAKE VACATIONS BECAUSE I hate leaving my typewriter, but occasionally I do. Some years back, the whole family (four of us) spent a most successful three-day period in the White Mountains at the very peak of the foliage season (and if you have never seen the foliage turn in New England, you have never seen the world in living color).

We came down from a trip up Mount Washington on the cog railway (against my will, for I am no dare-devil, but I lost the vote by the narrow margin of three to one) and found that it was rapidly getting dark. That meant we had to find a motel.

My wife said, "If we turn back the way we came, we will find a whole cluster of them just a couple of miles from here."

I replied, with the kind of man-of-the family decisiveness that made it clear there was to be no appeal, "I never turn back! We go *forward!*"

And we did go forward. We went forward through a state forest, without people or other automobiles. It got pitch dark for there were no street-lights, and for twenty-five miles we went forward through a universe of blackness, while the children got progressively more frightened and I got progressively more uneasy (what if I get a flat tire here and now!). Worst of all, we drove through the most glorious stretch of foliage color in all the world, and saw none of it.

On the whole, it was not one of my more intelligent decisions, something the family nobly forbore saying more than a mere fifty-eight times during the course of the epic drive. My only excuse was a plaintively reiterated, "But how could we go *backward?*"

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There's something about going the "wrong way" or "backward" that upsets methodical, self-disciplined people like myself, and it upsets astronomers, too. They have distinct notions as to what constitutes frontward and backward in motion.

For instance, if you view the Solar system from high above the Sun's north pole, then it turns out that of the nine major planets from Mercury to Pluto, exactly nine revolve about the Sun in a counterclockwise manner (as I explained in last month's article).

Therefore, counterclockwise motion is the right motion, the forward motion. It is "direct motion." Clockwise motion is the wrong motion, the backward motion. It is "retrograde motion" (from Latin, meaning "backward-stepping").

To be sure, in order to judge whether a planet is revolving about the Sun counterclockwise or clockwise, from a position above the Sun's north pole, the planet's orbit should, ideally, be in the plane of the Sun's equator. This is not exactly so in actual practice. The plane of the Earth's orbit is, for instance, at an angle of 7° to the plane of the Sun's equator. The plane of the orbits of other planets is also tipped to one slight extent or another.

Fortunately, the orbital planes of the various planets are sufficiently close to one another and to that of the Sun's equator to enable us to speak of such a thing as a "general planetary orbital plane." This is very close to Earth's orbital plane, which is usually referred to as the "ecliptic." I will speak of the "ecliptic" henceforward as the plane along which the flat structure of the Solar system (the Sun and its nine major planets) lies.

The ecliptic and the plane of the Sun's equator are close enough to raise no difficulties in the matter of counterclockwise and clockwise motion. Difficulties would indeed rise if the orbital plane were tipped considerably, however.

As you can see in Figure 1, if the plane of a planetary orbit is tipped through 180°, it shifts from an equatorial orbit to what is still an equatorial orbit, but after the shift, the revolution is clockwise, not counterclockwise. Motion has become retrograde.

If the plane of the orbit is tipped through an angle of 90°, it becomes a polar orbit. Viewed from high above the Sun's north pole, the planet would be seen passing back and forth across the face of the Sun. Its orbit would be seen on edge and its revolution would be neither counterclockwise, nor clockwise.

If the plane of the orbit, after being flipped 180° into clockwise motion, were flipped another 180°, it would be equatorial again and back

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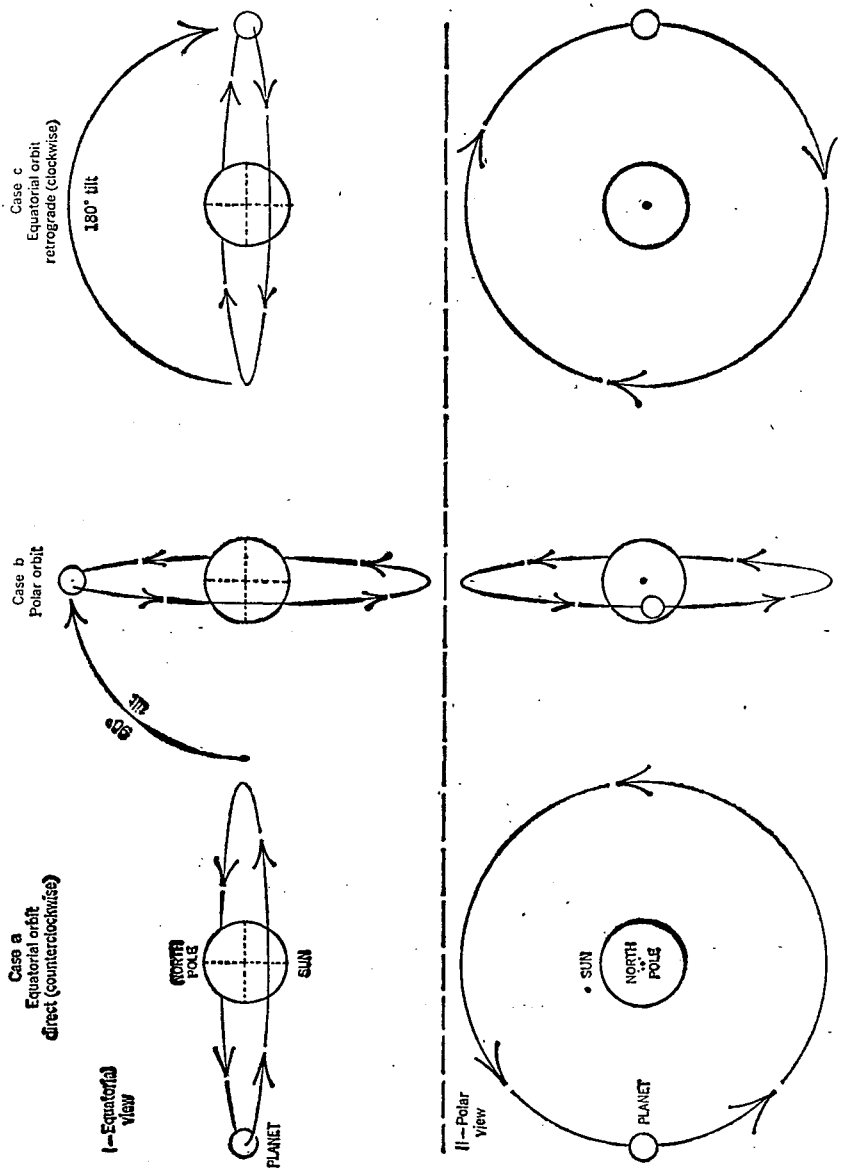
Figure 1—Orbital Tipping



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into counterclockwise once more. It will have gone through another ambiguous stage at 270°.

There are a couple of alternatives open to us. We can speak of "direct" movement for everything on one side of the right-angle tip and "retrograde" for everything on the other side. This is what is usually done in popular writing on astronomy, but it has its bad points. An orbit that is tipped 87° to the ecliptic would be direct and one that was tipped 93° would be retrograde, and if this were referred to *only* as direct or retrograde, respectively, there would be no indication of how close the two cases actually were or how relatively easy it might be to switch an orbit from that kind of direct to that kind of retrograde in the course of astronomic evolution.

My own recommendation would be to drop direct and retrograde as far as possible and deal only with orbital tipping. Any tip from 0° to 90° and from 270° to 360° would be direct, and anything from 90° to 270° would be retrograde.

To be sure, as far as planetary revolution is concerned, there is no fear of confusion. The greatest orbital tipping is in the case of Pluto, the orbit of which is in a plane that is tipped 17° to the ecliptic, which certainly isn't enough to confuse direct and retrograde.

Nevertheless, there are more than planets and orbital revolutions to the Solar system, and there will appear some point to my argument yet.

The unanimity with which the planets revolve in direct fashion seems significant to astronomers, and it must be explained in any theory describing the origin of the Solar system. The current theory has the Solar system beginning with a vast cloud of dust and gas, rotating about its axis in direct fashion, and imparting that direct motion to all the parts that developed out of it. Not only do the planets all revolve directly, but the Sun rotates directly about its own axis, too.

Ideally, by this theory, there should be no retrograde motion anywhere in the Solar system, yet there is. The cases of retrograde motion must be explained, if possible, without seriously affecting the general description of the origin of the Solar system.

For instance, comets travel about the Sun in orbits tipped by all amounts, and a number of them therefore move about the Sun in retrograde fashion.

Explanation: The comets may very well exist, to begin with, in a vast cloud spherically arranged about the Sun at a distance of a light-year or two (see STEPPING STONES TO THE STARS, October 1960). They represent the fringe of the original cloud of dust and gas, a fringe

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too rarefied to participate rapidly enough in the condensation of the inner portions and in the centrifugal force which spread the originally spherical cloud into a flat sheet. Consequently, when some comets (possibly by the gravitational influences of other stars) are sent in toward the Solar system proper from out of the vast cometary sphere, they can come in from any direction and may be retrograde as easily as direct.

Next come the asteroids. A number of them have highly tipped orbital planes, though actual retrograde motion is not to be found among them.

Explanation: The asteroids may have originated through an explosion of a small planet once circling in the region between Mars and Jupiter. The planet was undoubtedly revolving directly, but the explosion superimposed a second effect upon that of the original movement. Portions were sent hurling in all directions, so that some of the resulting asteroids move in fairly tilted orbits.

And what about the satellites?

Presumably, the material that was to form the planets condensed out of the fringes of the cloud that was forming the Solar system, set up a whirling sub-cloud of its own. In some cases, still smaller condensations formed in its outskirts to become satellites of the central planet.

If this is so, it is to be expected that the satellites would circle the planet in, or quite near, the plane of the planetary equator directly.

Of the 32 satellites in the Solar system (including Janus, a satellite of Saturn discovered in December of 1966 as a result of a queer combination of circumstances that will make a good subject for a future article), no less than 20 do indeed circle their central planet in orbits that are tilted by a degree, or less, to the plane of the planetary equator. Every one of these 20 (Mars possesses 2; Jupiter, 5; Saturn, 8; and Uranus, 5) do indeed revolve directly about their planets.

But what about the other 12? These do *not* revolve in the plane of the planetary equator and might be termed the "anomalous satellites."

The best example of an anomalous satellite is our own Moon, for its orbit is tilted considerably to our equatorial plane, the angle of tilt varying from 18.5° to 28.5° over an 18.6 year period.

Explanation: Some astronomers (and I, myself) feel that the Moon did not form out of the outskirts of the condensing cloud that was forming the Earth and therefore does not have to circle Earth in the latter's equatorial plane. Rather, the Moon may have been independently formed as a second planet in Earth's orbit and was, eventually "captured" by Earth (see JUST MOONING AROUND, May 1963).

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As rather impressive evidence for that, the plane of the Moon's orbit is tilted to the ecliptic by only 5°. It is as though there was a greater impulse for it to match the Sun's equatorial plane than the Earth's, and this is exactly what is to be expected of a body that is a planet in its own right and a satellite only by later accident. Despite the tilt, the Moon's revolution about the Earth, or about the Sun, whichever way you want to view it, is direct.

The remaining anomalous satellites are distributed as follows: Jupiter, 7; Saturn, 2; and Neptune, 2. We can begin with Jupiter.

Jupiter's five innermost satellites all revolve in the planetary equatorial plane and in orbits that are nearly circular. Not so the seven outermost, which are officially known only by Roman numerals in the order of discovery. All are small, with diameters ranging from a possible 10 miles to a possible 70. All have orbits that are both markedly tilted to Jupiter's equator and markedly eccentric.

They fall into two groups. Three of them: Jupiter VI, Jupiter VII and Jupiter X, all circle at an average distance of a little over 7 million miles. (Compare this with Callisto, the outermost of Jupiter's five equatorial satellites, which is only a trifle over 1 million miles from the planet.)

The remaining four: Jupiter VIII, Jupiter IX, Jupiter XI, and Jupiter XII, have orbits at average distances of from 13 to 15 million miles. Jupiter VIII has the most eccentric orbit of any of the Jovian satellites. It approaches to within 8 million miles of Jupiter and recedes to as far as 20 million.

The orbital tilt of the inner three of the anomalous satellites is about 30° or so, and their revolutionary motion is direct. The orbital tilt of the outer four, however, is something like 160° (rather close to "case c" in Figure 1) and their orbital motion is retrograde.

There are two questions. Why should any of the satellites revolve in retrograde fashion? And if any do, why this odd division into an inner group that is all direct and an outer that is all retrograde?

Explanation: Astronomers are generally agreed that the seven anomalous satellites of Jupiter are captured asteroids. After all, Jupiter is at the outer fringes of the asteroid belt, and an occasional asteroid, passing closely by it, could be trapped in its giant gravitational field. The asteroidal nature of the satellites would account for their small size, and the random nature of their capture would account for the marked tilt and eccentricity of their orbits.

It can be shown that it is easier for a planet to capture an asteroid

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moving in retrograde fashion than in direct. Ordinarily, there are more asteroids moving direct than retrograde, and if the approach is close enough to allow the planet to pick up any asteroid, it will be direct ones that will most probably be captured (like the inner-three).

Borderline approaches, however, where Jupiter's gravity just barely counterbalances the Sun's, will not yield a capture unless the asteroid can slip into a retrograde orbit, and that accounts for the outer-four.

If we pass on to Saturn, we find the same situation. Of its ten known satellites, the inner eight are equatorial, and the outer two are anomalous. Whereas the outermost of the eight equatorial satellites (Hyperion) is 0.9 million miles from Saturn, the ninth and tenth (Iapetus and Phoebe) are, respectively, 2.2 million and 8 million miles from Saturn. The anomalous satellites are of middle size, however, with Iapetus perhaps 800 miles across and Phoebe perhaps 200.

Again, the inner anomalous satellite has a tilt of about 10° to Saturn's equator and revolves directly. The outer one has a tilt of about 150° and is clearly retrograde.

Explanation: This would be identical to the one in the case of Jupiter.

That brings us to Neptune's two satellites, both of them anomalous. The outer one, Nereid, is a small body, perhaps 200 miles in diameter. It has an exceedingly eccentric orbit: the most eccentric orbit of any object in the Solar system except for various comets. The eccentricity, 0.76, allows it to approach Neptune to within 0.8 million miles and to recede to a distance of over 6 million. It's orbital tilt to the plane of Neptune's equator is marked but is small enough to keep its motion indisputably direct.

Explanation: Nereid, too, must be a captured asteroid, though we might wonder how it managed to get out that far. That Neptune could capture it in direct motion is probably thanks to the great distance of the Sun which reduced the competing Solar gravitational pull considerably. Even so, the extremely elliptical orbit probably indicates that Neptune just barely made the capture.

And Neptune's inner satellite, Triton? It is a large satellite, somewhat larger than our own Moon, and it circles Neptune in a nearly circular orbit at the small distance of 0.22 million miles (about the distance of our own Moon from us). And, like our own Moon, it is not an equatorial satellite, but is anomalous.

Could it be that, like our Moon, Triton was an independent planet forming in Neptune's orbit? Could it be that Triton, like the Moon,

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was captured by its larger brother? One fact that tends to increase the plausibility of this suggestion is that the Moon and Triton are the two largest of the satellites in terms of the mass of the planets they circle. The Moon is 1/80 the mass of the Earth, and Triton is 1/700 the mass of Neptune. All the equatorial satellites, which seem surely to have been formed as part of the planetary system to begin with and could never possibly have been independent planets, are much smaller in terms of their planets.

But if this were so, it would be nice to discover that Triton's orbital plane was at least fairly close to the ecliptic, as the Moon's is. That would give it that touch of the independent planet. Unfortunately, this is not so. The plane of Triton's orbit is tipped 220° to the ecliptic (and almost as much to the plane of Neptune's equator which is itself tipped somewhat to the ecliptic). This means that Triton revolves in retrograde fashion about Neptune, and why should that be?

Explanation: The only one I've ever heard is that a catastrophe may have taken place. Pluto may once have circled Neptune as another satellite. Its period would have been 6.7 days (its present rotational period) and that would place it only a little farther out than Triton, which has a period of 5.9 days. Some event may have forced Pluto out of its orbit and into an independent planetary one (of unusually high eccentricity and tilt for a major planet), and the same event may have tilted Triton's orbit into its present retrograde position. What the event may have been, though, no one can suggest.

Having done with revolutions about the Sun, how about rotations about an axis? I have already said that the Sun rotates about its axis directly.

Ideally, every body in the Solar system ought to do the same, with their equatorial planes all more or less coinciding with the ecliptic. To put it another way, their axes of rotation ought to be exactly perpendicular to the ecliptic. This is almost true in the case of Jupiter, which has its axis tipped only 3° from the perpendicular.

Our Moon's north pole is tipped to the ecliptic by an even lesser extent, only 1.5°, and the rotation of the Moon about its axis (and of Jupiter about its axis) is direct.

However, the Moon is the only non-planetary body that provides us with clear data on its rotation. The other satellites (to say nothing of asteroids) are too far away for good information on rotation. We have determined periods of rotation for Mercury and Pluto but don't have decent data on the orientation of their axes of rotation.

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What about the remaining 7 planets, however. I've already mentioned Jupiter; and Earth's North Pole, as we all know, is tipped through an angle of 23.5° from the perpendicular to the ecliptic. That is what gives us our seasons, makes the days and nights vary in length through the years, accounts for our climatic zones and so on. However, the tilting is not enough to alter the fact that the Earth's rotation is direct.

Other planets have a similar polar tilt. For Mars, it is 25°; for Saturn, 27°; and for Neptune, 29°. All rotate directly, for the situation here is the same as for orbital planets. It is only when the polar tilt reaches 90° that direct motion ceases. For tilts over 90°, rotation is retrograde (see Figure 2).

But why is it that there should be an axial tilt at all?

Explanation: I don't know of any official explanation, but a thought has occurred to me. As the planets formed out of the original cloud of gas and dust, they would eventually form several large chunks which would, for a while, be a "multiple-planet." Circling in complex orbits they might eventually come together, striking each other off center. Might it not be that the random coming together might end by imparting a bit of "English" to the direction of rotation which would be reflected in the axial tilt?—Or is this mechanically impossible? Unfortunately, I don't know.

And even if this is so, the real surprise is the close correspondence between the polar tilts of four planets: Earth, Mars, Saturn, and Neptune. Can this be pure coincidence and nothing more?

The planet, Uranus, has a very odd rotation; for the tilt of Uranus's north pole is 98°. This is past the 90° mark so that people (even astronomers) usually say that Uranus has a retrograde rotation. But it is not very retrograde at all; and it is misleading to call it that. If you look at Figure 2, Uranus's manner of rotation is close to that of case "c." (Jupiter's corresponds roughly to case "a" and that of Earth, Mars, Saturn, and Neptune, roughly to case "b").

Uranus actually rolls on its side, so to speak, and is not clearly direct or clearly retrograde (and it is this I had in mind when I argued against indiscriminate use of these terms early in the article).

Whatever managed to tilt Uranus's axis must have done so before the planetary system was entirely formed, for the five satellites of Uranus had their orbits twisted to correspond and circle in Uranus's far-tilted equatorial plane. For that matter, the equatorial satellites of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn follow the tip of the pole of their planets, too. (Uranus's odd manner of rotation produces queer effects as far as the

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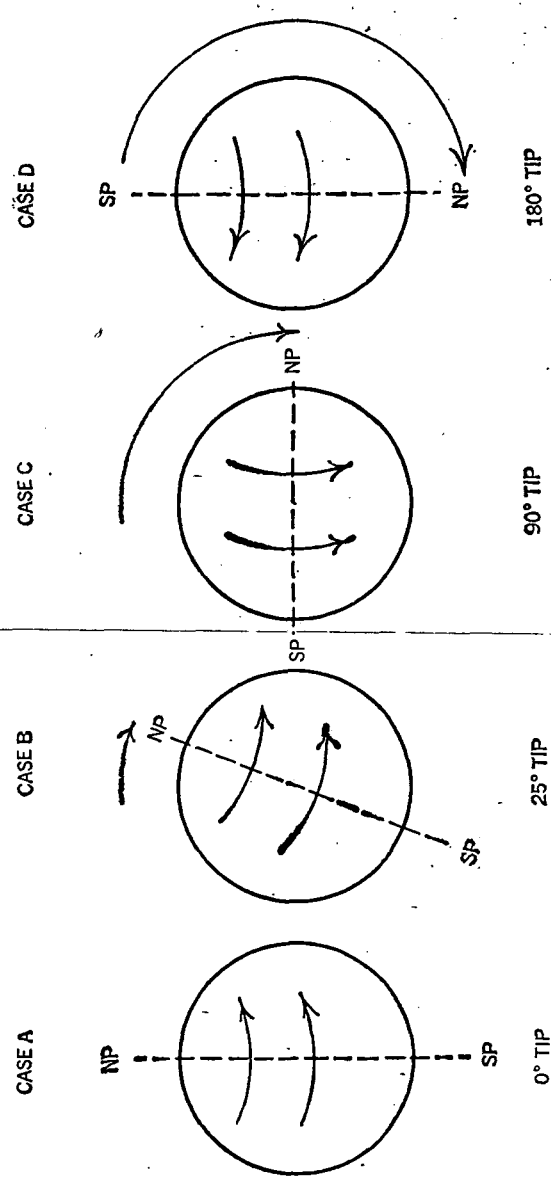
Figure 2—Axial Tipping



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apparent motion of the Sun in its sky is concerned, but that is for another article some day.)

Explanation: I can only say that off-center collisions produced a right-angle twist in Uranus's motion. This is an extraordinarily weak suggestion, I feel, but I can think of nothing else.

And now we come to Venus. Until recently, nothing was known about Venus's period of rotation or of its axial tilt; absolutely nothing. One simply couldn't see through the clouds, and the clouds themselves had no markings that could be followed around the planet as it rotated.

There were guesses, to be sure, and mistaken observations. The period of Venus's rotation was suggested as anything from 24 hours (like that of the Earth) to 225 days (its period of revolution). On the whole, the consensus was that Venus's period of rotation was equal to its period of revolution and that, like Mercury, it faced one side forever to the Sun.

But then radar measurements were taken in 1964, and these showed that Venus did *not* face only one side to the Sun, any more than Mercury did (see THE DANCE OF THE SUN, April 1966). Venus's period of rotation turned out to be 243 days, a little *longer* than its orbital period. It was the first case ever discovered of a body rotating about its axis in a period longer than that in which it revolved about a central body. What's more, Venus's north pole was tilted at an angle of 87°, so that its case was very much like that of case "d" in Figure 2. This meant Venus's rotation was retrograde; not fake retrograde as in the case of Uranus, but real retrograde.

Obviously, we must ask why. How can Venus, in the process of formation, have been tipped over completely? Why should it be standing on its head? The notion of off-center collisions in the final stage of planet-making might account for a 25° tilt; it might just possibly account for a 90° tilt—but a complete 180° tilt?

Astronomers are bound to look for something else. Perhaps the effect of some other body in the Solar system so influenced Venus as to cause it to take on this odd rotation. The natural body to suspect is the Sun, for it is fairly close to Venus, and its gravitational effect would surely swamp all others.

If it is the Sun, though, then Venus ought to have a day that fits closely the period of its revolution. If it faced one side always to the Sun, then one Venus rotation would equal one Venus revolution. Or there might be something like the case of Mercury, where one Mercury revolution is equal to two Mercury days (from noon to noon).

Let's check the length of the Venus day, then, from noon to noon. (The method for doing so is presented in last month's article.) With a

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243-day rotation about its axis, the apparent daily motion of the Sun in the sky of Venus as a result of that rotation is 360°/243 or 1.48°. Since the motion is retrograde, we must have a negative sign: —1.48°.

Since there is a 225-day revolution about the Sun, the apparent daily motion of the Sun in the sky of Venus as a result of that revolution is 360°/225 or 1.6°. A direct revolution must also involve a negative sign, so we make that —1.6°. Adding the two figures: —1.48° and —1.6°, we have —3.08°. This means the Sun moves from west to east (if it were east to west as with us there would have been a positive sign, +3.08°) a little over three degrees each Earth-day.

The Sun would make a complete circuit of Venus's sky, from noon to the next noon in 360°/—3.08° or —117 days, where the negative sign still stands for a west-to-east motion of the Sun. Consequently, we end by saying that one Venus-day is equal to 117 Earth-days (with the Sun moving in opposite directions in the two cases).

Thus the Venus year is 1.835 Venus days long, not a very even figure.

But consider this. The synodic period of Venus is 584 days long. This is the period between successive moments when Venus is exactly between Earth and the Sun.

But then, the synodic period of Venus is almost exactly 5 Venus days long. This means that every time Venus is exactly between us and the Sun, the same side of Venus, exactly the same side, faces us.—It is as though Venus's period of rotation is linked to Earth somehow!

But how can Earth's puny gravitation have an effect on Venus that would supersede the Sun's giant pull? Surely, this is impossible?

Explanation: Astronomers are trying to figure this out, but I would like to advance my own theory. I wonder if Venus's rotational period has, perhaps, not yet reached equilibrium; if it has not yet reached a final value. Perhaps, Venus's rotational period is slowly speeding up under the Sun's influence and will, some day, reach a period of 225 days *retrograde.* Its period of rotation will then be equal to its period of revolution, but in the opposite direction. The result would then be that there would be exactly two Venus days in one Venus year. This would be just the case that exists on Mercury, except that Venus would do it by retrograde rotation and Mercury by direct rotation.

As for the apparent connection between Venus's rotation and its synodic period—well, there *are* coincidences in the Universe, and I think this is one of them. The thing to do is to continue measuring Venus's rotation as accurately as possible and see if there is a slow but steady speeding up of that rotation over the years.

And if there is—well, you heard it here first.

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David Redd follows his impressive debut in these pages (SUNDOWN, December 1967) with this equally impressive tale of wintry landscapes and wintry Maija, and of the Snow Friend who shares with her the dream of the land-without-men.

A QUIET KIND OF MADNESS

by David Redd

TWO GOLDEN EYES WERE STARing at her out of the snowdrift. Maija stopped, stood there at the edge of the forest and gazed at the creature. It was large, about the size of a three-month old calf, and was covered with soft white fur which blended into the snow. Slowly she walked towards it, and the golden eyes followed her movements.

It was very like a polar bear cub, she decided. The muzzle was flatter, giving the white face a strangely human appearance, but on the whole the creature did resemble a bear.

"Who are you?" she asked softly, speaking more to herself than to the animal.

It heard her and half opened its mouth. She glimpsed a broad pink tongue behind two rows of shining white teeth.

Then the creature moved forward: Maija started back, hand on the knife at her belt. But it stumbled, and collapsed in the snow at her feet. One of its paws fell across her left snowshoe.

She bent down, very cautiously, and lifted the paw. It was trembling. She pulled off her glove to feel the hairless pad on the underside of the paw. The skin was cold and almost violet in color.

At the touch of her hand the creature's eyelids parted, and she looked into the golden eyes again. All her fear vanished. This crea-

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ture was cold and shivering, perhaps ill, certainly too weak to stand. The mute appeal in its eyes was only too easy to understand.

Putting her glove back on, she took hold of the creature's body and lifted it out of the snowdrift. It was surprisingly light, and she wondered whether its weakness was due to hunger. It made no attempt to resist. She had no difficulty in draping its limp form around her shoulders—like one of the fur wraps worn by the city ladies—for it allowed her to do what she liked with it. Only a very sick animal would trust her to that extent. She could feel its heart beating, very slowly.

She carried it through the pine forest, where she had made a path by cutting off the lower branches. Twigs brushed against the creature, but it made no protest. It did not even stiffen its muscles.

Maija emerged from the trees and carried on over the frozen lake. Her small timber hut was on the edge of the woods on the far shore. This part of the country was mostly water, with wide, shallow lakes separated by long narrow strips of tree-covered land. Now the waters were under the windswept ice: they would not reappear until the spring.

The hut was old, built entirely of wooden planks, with a turf roof now covered by the snow. Several small birds were fluttering round it as she arrived home. They did not fly away, for they had known her for years. In winter she always threw them the remains of her meals.

Maija unhooked the latch, pushed the door inward with her knees and carried her unprotesting burden inside. Its heartbeat seemed very slow indeed now.

She laid the soft white body on her bed, which was three feet above the floor, being the top of a small cupboard. The creature's back was smoothly curved, and very still. But the eyes were open, watching her.

The animal needed warmth and food, she decided. There was no trace of any injury on its body. She closed the door, went over to the porcelain stove in the corner and poked some life into the fire. A blast of heat rolled out through the grille into the room, and the white creature lifted its head slightly.

"There, do you like that, my Snow Friend?" she called, seeing the movement.

Stripping off her snowshoes, gloves, anorak and cap, she investigated the corner which served as her larder. At the back of one shelf was a tin of glucose, a relic of her visit to Kurovesi with Timo.

Yes, glucose would be the best thing. Her Snow Friend could hardly cope with solid food in his present condition. Taking a glass from the shelf, she mixed the powdery sugar with warm water from

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the pan of melted snow on the stove.

The creature was lying flat on its stomach. She lifted up its head, pried open its mouth and let the sweet liquid trickle down its throat. Some of the sugar solution spilled over onto the bed, but the creature swallowed the rest. Maija gave it three glasses before it refused to drink any more.

She stayed by the bed, stroking the smooth fur and trying to think what the animal could be, until she gradually realized it was no longer shivering. The room was much warmer now.

She used up all the remaining water in giving the creature another ration of glucose. This time she made the mixture stronger. When the creature had finished drinking—spilling far less than before—it rested its head between its paws and closed its eyes. Maija stood up, smiling at her sleeping Snow Friend, and put on her anorak again. It was time she found some food for herself.

Dressed for the outdoors again, she collected her fishing tackle from the heap of tools, carvings and other objects in the corner. Her fishing rod was made of some greenish, faintly transparent material which was a kind of glass, or so the rod's previous owner had told her. It was certainly one of the best rods she had ever possessed.

Outside, she sat on a grey rock by the hole she had cut in the ice. She could only walk out to this rock with dry feet in winter: during the summer it was a tiny island surrounded by shallow water. She scattered a handful of grubs into the hole for ground bait—to attract the fish—then threw in her line and settled down to wait. Her rod was balanced on a short forked stick thrust into a crevice.

Watching her float drifting on the shadowy water, she thought about Snowfriend. She had nursed sick animals back to health before, but Snowfriend was different. There was no way of finding out who he was or where he had come from, and she suspected that not even a city professor could tell her. All she knew was that he existed. She had seen he was male when she pulled him from the snowdrift, and now that she had named him, she was thinking of him as a male person. She always thought of her pets as people, once she got to know them.

His cold paws had ended in stubby fingers, almost hidden by the fur. Maybe he had thumbs as well, but she had not seen them. His teeth, inside his lipless mouth, were capable of tearing as well as biting and chewing. Like a human being, Snowfriend could eat both plants and meat. He resembled a small polar bear, and yet he was not a bear. He was something entirely new in her experience.

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Snowfriend was still asleep, curled up into a white furry ball, when Maija returned to the warmth of the hut. She did not disturb him, but settled down to the work of gutting the fish she had caught. She wondered whether Snowfriend ate fish, and whether he preferred them cooked or raw. It would be easy to find out, she thought. Then it occurred to her that she had not heard him make a single sound: Snowfriend had not even grunted when she picked him up. Perhaps he was dumb, like the old man who had lived in this hut until the winters finally killed him.

That evening Maija fed Snowfriend again. He ate two lake trout —cooked—drank the water she gave him and settled back to sleep, without stirring from her bed. Somehow, from the angle of his head and the expression in his golden eyes, she understood that he was grateful. She smoothed the fur on his head and left him to sleep in peace.

As Snowfriend was in the only bed, she would have to spend the night on the floor in front of the ancient porcelain stove. Normally she slept in the old way, sitting up in bed with her back against the wall, and resting stretched out on a level surface would be something new for her. She was still amused by the novelty as she went off to sleep.

In the morning, just before she awoke, she had a dream and knew that she was dreaming. She was in the land-without-men, a warm and friendly place quite unlike the subjects of her usual dreams. Snowfriend was beside her, guiding her through the glades by the light of a gentle sunset. In this land the animals spoke to each other with soundless voices. Knowing this, Maija was certain Snowfriend was trying to tell her something—

She was awake, and her head was on the floor. For a moment she thought the floor and the wall had changed places in the night, and the huge stove was about to crash down upon her, but she remembered where she was, and why. The room returned to normal.

How was Snowfriend this morning? She went to the bed, put her hands on its wooden side and leaned over, smiling down at Snowfriend. He looked up at her and slowly raised himself until he was standing upright on his two hind legs. He was well again! Maija almost laughed from the relief.

And suddenly her joy turned to terror, for Snowfriend flung his arms around her body like a bear crushing its victim. She had time to think: He's going to kill me after all!

Then Snowfriend had released her and fallen back onto the bed, before she could realize what had

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happened. His eyes were staring full into hers. He was as shocked as she. A string of jumbled ideas babbled somewhere in her mind: Poor-Snowfriend-I-love-him-he-was-grateful-I-frightened-him-I'm sorry-I-should-have-known-why-did - I - think - it - Snowfriend - knows-love-and-showed-me-the-land-without-men— She tried to calm herself. Snowfriend knew her thoughts. He did not speak because his kind did not need speech. He had shown her that in their dream together. Had she really shared that dream with Snowfriend?

She looked at him lying on the bed, and was ashamed of her doubts. She caught him in her arms, pressing him to her body, and her confusion was ended. He needed her, so she would help him.

They had their breakfast in front of the stove, and during the meal Snowfriend peered through the metal grille at the peat slowly burning inside. Perhaps he was reassuring himself that the fire would not go out. Watching him, Maija could see that cold and exhaustion had been the only things wrong with him. He was recovering very quickly.

When the meal was almost over, she offered him the last trout. He nodded, stretched out a paw and pulled it towards himself.

"Did you enjoy that, Snowfriend?" she asked him. This time the shaking of his head was an unmistakable "yes." He was still mute, but he had found a way to reply to her. She had a habit of nodding slightly when she approved of something, and Snowfriend must have realized what she meant. This strange creature was quick to learn.

Snowfriend soon had a chance to use his new ability. Maija now had to provide for two, and she would have to go fishing again today. She decided where to go and was pulling her rod from the heap in the corner when Snowfriend padded over to her. He stood up on his hind legs and nodded vigorously, looking just like a dog begging for a walk. She started to ask, "Do you want to come with me?" but left the sentence unfinished. Snowfriend was nodding even harder than before, and there could be no mistaking his meaning.

So Maija and Snowfriend set off together through the snow-covered forests. Maija did not normally fish in the lake where she lived, and this morning she was taking Snowfriend to the lake she visited most often. She hoped it would repay him for that dream vision of the land-without-men.

This particular lake had an unusual feature—the rotting hull of an old steamer, a little cargo ship which had made the journey from

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Teuvasaari to Savonlinna once a week. Now the battered vessel was frozen into the ice near the tree-lined bank, and each year it sank a little further into the mud. Snowfriend happily explored the wooden ruin while Maija got down to the serious business of fishing. Every so often he showed himself to her and then disappeared below the crumbling deck to continue prowling the gloomy cargo holds. These holds had floors of ice, for the water had leaked in through the gaps in the side.

Maija had seated herself on the patch of firm planking in the stern, where she could look out over the lake towards the opposite shore. Except for the small hole she had made, the ice stretched away in a smooth unbroken surface; the snow was piled up in a huge white wall at the eastern end of the lake. That great snowdrift was the nearest thing to a mountain she had seen in this flat lake country.

Snowfriend hurried up to her, trying to attract her attention. As he came to her, she heard the faint sounds of something brushing aside branches among the trees. She laid her rod on the timber deck and turned towards the near shore, looking for a sign of movement.

A tall, fur-clad man emerged from the forest. Snowfriend bolted and dived through a hole in the deck.

"I thought you would be here," said the hunter.

"Go away!" Maija shouted. It was her friend Timo, but she was in no mood for human company.

"What was that I saw with you —a polar bear? You find the strangest pets!"

"You leave my Snowfriend alone!" After all, Timo was a hunter, and Snowfriend had the most wonderful fur. . . .

"I won't hurt it." Timo was standing on the bank, making no effort to come to the old ship. "You really prefer animals to human beings, don't you?"

"Can you blame me?" And then, because Timo was a good man and had been kind to her that summer in Kurovesi, she asked less harshly, "What do you want?"

"I came to warn you about Igor. He is on his way here."

Igor was the big half-Russian hunter who had tried to rape her six months ago. After she had driven him off, he had sworn to come back, and Maija had not thought he would return so soon.

"Maija, I said Igor is coming."

Still she made no reply. Igor was here again, and now she had Snowfriend to protect. A sick animal with a valuable skin would not live long while Igor had a rifle in his hand.

Timo shrugged and started walking back into the forest. He had delivered his warning: what Maija did next was up to her.

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"Timo!" Maija called. He paused and looked at her inquiringly. Some vestige of conscience made her shout "Thank you!" Timo waved in acknowledgment and walked on. Within seconds he had vanished among the shadows.

Snowfriend cautiously poked his head out from his refuge. Seeing that the danger was past, he pulled himself up from the hole and joined Maija in the stern. She picked up her rod and looked at Snowfriend sadly. "I wish *I* lived in the land-without-men!"

Despite the news brought by Timo, Maija went on fishing for another two hours. She was very conscious of the fact that her only weapon was the knife at her hip. Her guns were back at the hut. But being Maija, she would not hurry home just because Igor was on his way. She would prepare for him, but in her own time. Meanwhile, she continued fishing from the stern.

Her strange calm worried Snowfriend, who sat beside her and kept looking back at the forest behind them. She had no need to explain the situation to him: her thoughts had told him everything

Maija felt a little less sure of herself when she and Snowfriend started on the journey back to her hut. Igor could be anywhere, in the next strip of woodland or even waiting for her by her own lake. Now she wished she had gone back for a gun at once. Snowfriend seemed tired now, and that was her own fault too. It was less than a day since she had rescued him half-dead from the snowdrift. She should not have taken him so far this early.

Eventually she had to pick him up and carry him the rest of the way. So, once again, the small birds which lived under the eaves of her hut saw her bearing Snowfriend over the frozen lake.

The snow around her hut was undisturbed save for the footprints of a wild duck. Igor had not arrived.

Maija went straight in and laid Snowfriend on the bed. He rolled over and curled himself into a ball again. It occurred to Maija that Snowfriend was not well adapted to life in temperatures below freezing. His resemblance to a polar bear was deceptive. Perhaps she could make him something to wear outdoors—he would understand what clothes were for.

While Snowfriend slept through the afternoon, Maija went out again to see whether there was any sign of Igor. She was armed with the light air rifle which was her favorite hunting weapon, and if she had seen Igor she would have used it. But he was not to be found, and she returned to the hut.

Snowfriend was awake when she came back. He was sniffing around in the untidy corner where most of her belongings were piled. Plainly

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he was wondering what all these things were. So she carefully explained their uses to him—he could hear her thoughts, even if he could not understand her words. She also showed him things which had no use at all, things she kept because she liked them. There was a burnished shield of bog-iron, and a dull silver ring she had dug up from an old burial mound. Nailed to the timber wall was the wooden ship's wheel of the old steamer she and Snowfriend had visited that morning. Beside the wheel on the wall was a life-size wooden relief of a duck in flight, a picture carved by the deaf-and-dumb man who had built the hut many years ago.

The last of her treasures was a transparent colorless jewel which she and Timo had found in an old ruined house near Kurovesi. The house had once belonged to a famous professor, but it had been empty for many years. Timo, who was very clever and could pass for a townsman if he wore the right clothes, had shown her how to hold the jewel in front of a lamp so that lines of bright rainbow light danced across the opposite wall. Snowfriend quickly grasped the idea when she demonstrated it, but his little fingers could not hold the jewel without blocking out the lamplight from it. After three or four failures he allowed Maija to retrieve the jewel.

That night, in her dreams of the land-without-men, Snowfriend walked beside her as tall as a man. In each hand he held a jewel which flashed rainbow fire through the forest.

Then the vision faded, and she was left with only an unbearable knowledge of Snowfriend's love—love for Maija, love for his fellow creatures, love for the land which was his home. The feeling of love was so overpowering that she was sobbing with joy. Gradually she felt dampness on her face, and realised that she was crying in her sleep. She opened her eyes and raised her head.

She was still in her hut. In the dim ghostly moonlight she saw all her old familiar possessions and knew that the land-without-men was very far away. Now she was sobbing for a different reason. Presently the emotion passed, and she grew quiet. After a while she was asleep again.

This time the dream was clearer. Snowfriend could tell her his thoughts more easily than on the first night. Once again he guided her through the land-without-men, introducing her to all the animals, showing her the landscape of his home. The woods were full of broad-leafed southern trees, not the evergreen pines of her own country. Several times he showed her the furry white creatures which were his own kind. The fluffy white cubs were playing in a large glade in the soft evening light, watched

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over by their parents. Seeing the small red sun low on the horizon, Maija realised that it was always evening in the land-without-men. The discovery only increased her delight; of all the times of the day, Maija loved the evening best.

Snowfriend led her through the forest, along a narrow, well-trodden path. She could hear the sound of falling water nearby. Then the path curved over to the side of the stream, and as she walked, she saw the swift water bubbling between the banks and swirling away behind her. A fish darted out of the dark water-weed and disappeared downstream.

"Just a little further," Snowfriend seemed to be saying. Maija followed him upstream along the bank. The trees were thinner here, with less undergrowth between them. Looking ahead, she saw something huge and dark behind the trees, like a great black wall of shadow. The noise of falling water was much louder now. In another moment she and Snowfriend came out of the trees into the small open space in front of the waterfall. The stream came tumbling down twenty feet from the top of the rock face before them. It was like the inland cliffs she had seen at Isolahti, thought Maija. In the shadow of the cliff, little trees and shrubs grew in the thin soil. Ferns and moss grew on the damp rocks where the water came down, and on the cracks and ledges in the cliff face. The sound of the waterfall was like music.

Snowfriend went up to the waterfall, and she saw a darker shadow behind the spray. She hurried after him and found herself in a cave. There was a carpet of hay over a floor of small rounded pebbles.

"This is my home," said Snowfriend.

"It's wonderful!" She came further in, bending to avoid the low roof. She settled down beside him on the hay. They could see the water cascading down outside.

This cave led right into the cliff, Snowfriend explained. Maija looked back, her eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, and saw that the cave was much longer than she had imagined. She could not see where it ended.

"It goes right through to your country," said Snowfriend.

He had been exploring the cave system for years, he told her. One day he went along a new passage and traveled further into the rock than ever before. Eventually he saw light ahead, and soon emerged into a country totally unlike his homeland. The snow and ice he saw were completely new to him. He wandered about, exploring the strange frozen country, until he suddenly realized he was lost. He frantically searched for the cave entrance, growing weaker all the time, but without success. Finally he had collapsed in the snowdrift.

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And that was how Snowfriend had come into her life. She called him her Snow Friend, but he was not a creature of the snow at all. He had come up through the dark tunnels from this gentle land where winter was unknown.

Maija thought about how it would be to live here in this cave forever, with Snowfriend beside her. In the land-without-men there would be no hunters coming to intrude upon her life. She remembered seeing the cubs playing in the glade and the soft sleepy smell of the woods she had walked through. In her happiness she clung tightly to Snowfriend, hugging him and loving him for showing her all this.

Morning came, and Maija awoke. She remembered her dreams vividly. She looked around her hut, comparing her existence here to life in the land-without-men. There was no question which she would prefer, if she had the choice. But she did have the choice! Somewhere near here was the entrance to the land-without-men. If Snowfriend could give her a mental picture of the scene she would surely recognise it.

All she needed was a few more minutes of dreaming with Snowfriend. She closed her eyes and tried to sleep. But sleep refused to come, no matter how hard she tried. Finally she gave up. She would not learn the location of the cave today. By now she was too wide awake to dream again, and Snowfriend only spoke to her in dreams.

If she had only slept a little longer, she would have known where to find the entarnce. Then, this morning, she could have gone there with Snowfriend and left the world of men forever. Now she would have to wait another day until sleep came again, and she might not have the time. Somewhere beyond her walls, Igor was marching across the snow towards her. She did not doubt that he would come straight to her hut. Well, she would face up to him. In this land the people did not run away from their problems.

Perhaps she could intercept Igor before he came to the hut, she thought. She had to keep him away from Snowfriend, for Igor was a hunter and he would shoot Snowfriend for his fur.

When she looked outside, she saw that more snow had fallen during the night. All the old tracks had been covered, and the air was cold and clean. This made things easier. If she saw any footprints now, she could be sure they were only a few hours old. After breakfast, she and Snowfriend sat on the floor by the stove to think out the strategy for the day.

But she was interrupted in the middle of her planning. There were two heavy thumps on the door, and a deep voice called, "Maija!"

Igor was here! She scrambled to her feet and snatched up her air

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rifle. *Snowfriend must hide,* she thought, and as he darted for the corner, she pulled a blanket from her bed and flung the brown cloth over him. Now he was safe.

She swung the door open and confronted Igor, aiming the rifle at his chest. He stood in her doorway unmoving. She had forgotten that a man could be so big. In his winter furs he seemed larger than ever. His eyes were huge and black.

"I wish to speak with you, Maija. Will you let me come in?" His voice was slow, neither gruff nor gentle, easy to listen to.

"No!" Let him into her hut? Six months ago she had seen him stumbling away into the forest, bleeding from the knife thrust that had just missed his heart. That knife was at her belt now. "We can talk here."

He swung the heavy pack from his shoulders, dropped it on the snow and sat down on it. "Very well, we shall talk here. I want you, Maija."

"I can shoot you now." Looking at him, she wished she had brought the shotgun. An air rifle could hardly deal with this giant. "And if I did not shoot, my knife still likes your blood."

"Do not talk like that, Maija. I mean you no harm. I only want to have you and be with you."

"I would kill you first." She stroked the trigger of her rifle. She knew what this man was. He had spread his hands in a gesture of honesty, but his face was blank.

"Igor, go away and leave me in peace. I want nothing from you, nothing. If you stay I'll kill you."

She thought of Snowfriend cowering under the blanket. Igor would kill him if he saw that fur.

"You have grown hard, Maija. You should not live alone."

"I am not alone. I have my friends!"

"Your pets—the animals that you nurse in your bed?" His great dark eyes were staring into hers. "Maija, do you remember what it is like to live with a man?"

"I remember *you!*"

"Maija, then I was hasty, I did not understand you. I know better now."

"And I know better than to trust you again."

Somehow her rifle had slanted downwards while she talked. She raised it again. It seemed as though only she and Igor existed in the world, and the land was a white blur around them. Somewhere beyond the world a bird was singing.

"Believe me, I do not wish to hurt you." His hands were still spread open: they had not moved since he sat down.

"You don't want to hurt me? Then why did you—why did you do what you did?"

"I thought you wanted me, Maija, just as I wanted you." And still there was no expression on his face. Only his eyes were alive.

"You were wrong, Igor. Now go! Don't come here again!"

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Her voice sounded strained even to herself.

Igor stood up, his dark form massive against the snow. Maija nearly fired in panic at his sudden movement, but she controlled herself in time.

"Maija, has any other person come to you this year?"

"I have allowed no man in my hut since you left."

"So." Igor picked up his pack and settled it on his shoulders, slipping his arms through the straps. She could never have lifted such a weight, but Igor could carry it all day.

"Maija, I shall not go far. I shall stay near here and wait until you change your mind."

"You will wait forever," said Maija.

She watched him walk away into the trees. Was he really leaving? She must follow him. But she must have something more powerful than the air rifle.

Inside the hut, she remembered Snowfriend and swept the blanket aside. He had curled himself into a white ball again. He jumped up and brushed against her, standing on two legs like a man. She was too busy to do more than quickly ruffle the fur on his head.

"You stay here, Snowfriend. I'm going after Igor." She closed the door on him, knowing he would be safe enough in the hut.

Maija followed Igor until he started to cross the next lake, and there she stopped. If she followed him out over the ice he would only have to look back to see her. And this lake was so long and wide that a direct route was the only reasonable way of crossing it. From the cover of the trees she watched him reach the opposite bank. She waited for nearly half an hour, but he did not reappear. She dare not go on now that she had lost sight of him, for he might be waiting in ambush somewhere. Disappointed, she made her way back to her hut.

In the bleak afternoon there was no wind and no sun. The featureless cloud covered the sky, its color matching the ice below. Maija lay on the grey stone like a seal resting on an island beach, Snowfriend at her feet. She liked to fish from this rock, but she was not fishing now. She was not even seeing the lake, although her eyes were open.

"Wherever Igor is, he hasn't gone far," she said, and Snowfriend nodded his agreement. "But I hate having people near me, and he's worse than any of them. I must do something! I can either go out and look for him, or I can stay here and wait for him to come to me."

She had to settle the problem of Igor before she and Snowfriend went off to the cave entrance. She could not bear to think of Igor following them into the land-without-men.

"So, my Snow Friend, I must de-

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cide. And when I see him again, what shall I do? I wanted to kill him, but I didn't think of it when I could have shot him easily; he would have let me get close to him."

Her gloved hand was gently pawing at a small crack in the stone, she discovered. Rather surprised, she made it stop. "That hand could have killed Igor this morning, Snowfriend. Why didn't it?"

She was only whispering, but her voice seemed very loud.

"I didn't want to kill him. He hasn't behaved like an enemy at all! He came to me, said what he wanted to say and went away. Now he's waiting for me to do something. This time yesterday I hated him, and this morning, but now it's all gone, as if it happened to some other person."

Her wandering eyes focussed on Snowfriend, his white fur so much brighter than the dull winter colours around him. "At least you haven't changed, Snowfriend. You're still yourself. Can you advise me, Snowfriend?"

And he nodded!

"Should I search for Igor, or should I stay here and wait until he comes? If I go, I'll have to leave you in the hut again—Igor lives by taking furs. Well, Snowfriend, should I go?"

He nodded, almost imperceptibly.

"Should I stay?"

He did not move his head at all.

"I shall go!" Maija shouted. "I shall find him, wherever he is!"

She felt a cold breath against her cheek. It was the afternoon breeze, coming to clear the pall of cloud from the sky. Maija stood, her feet on the highest point of the rock, and gazed upwards. For a moment the clouds above her thinned, and in that instant she saw the pale disc of the sun. It was an omen.

There was a thin line of clear sky on the horizon as Maija set out on Igor's trail. There would be no snow tonight, but the frost would be heavier than usual. She wondered where Igor was going to spend the night.

She followed his footprints until there was no longer any uncertainty about his destination. He was making for the old wooden steamship frozen into its last harbor. She had shown it to him when they were still friends, and he had not forgotten.

Igor, at her best fishing lake, living in the ship she regarded as her own. The thought made her walk more swiftly, and now she was beginning to hate him again.

She reached the ship and hauled herself up onto the deck, which was about four feet above the level of the ice. She went along the thin strip of safe planking to the stern. Impressions in the thin layer of snow showed that Igor had wandered all over the old vessel. However, he was not here now.

In the stern, she seated herself

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on the wooden block. She had been fishing from here when Timo told her about Igor's return. Timo had come out from those trees. . . .

She saw Igor, his massive figure black against the white background, coming towards her from the head of the lake. He was about a quarter of a mile away, moving rapidly across the ice. Maija nodded to herself and aimed the shotgun at him, but her finger was not on the trigger.

Maija, Maija, what will you do to him?

The killing would be to no purpose. She no longer hated him. She sighed, and laid the gun down, and waited for him to come aboard.

"It is good to see you again so soon," he said, and now his deep voice had warmth.

"Perhaps. Do not think I have changed my mind, Igor."

"Then why have you come?"

"I have to know what you are doing."

"I am hunting!" He reached into the sack he was carrying— she noticed his pack was missing—and brought out a wild duck. "I must have food in my little home here, Maija."

"Your home? What do you mean?"

"I shall show you. Look."

Returning the duck to his sack, Igor walked along to a large hole at the side of the deck. The hole was square and must have been covered by a hatch when the ship was in use. From it, a little wooden staircase led down into the dark empty space which had been the engine room. Metal seekers had removed all the fittings years ago.

Igor went down the stairway. Maija paused, picked up the gun and followed him with her hand on her knife. The inside of the ship lit up as she descended.

"For you, Maija, I light the candle." Igor was kneeling and setting a thick white candle down on the ice floor. The ceiling, the wooden deck, was only a few inches above his head. Maija bent down and went over to him. She could see his few belongings neatly spread out on some planking in a corner— that explained where his pack had gone to.

"Will you live here?" she asked, kneeling in front of him.

"Yes, Maija. There is nowhere else I can stay." He looked very solemn in the yellow candlelight.

She looked round the old engine room. Except for this corner, there was nothing but the ice and the ancient timber to be seen. She saw the pale daylight coming through countless holes in the sides and deck. She thought of her hut, with the peat burning in the stove and Snowfriend waiting for her to come home. She would have pitied Igor if she had thought this was the only home he had. But he had chosen this for himself.

Maija stood up as best she could. "You need not waste any more of

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your candle, Igor." She went up the little stairway.

The breeze had died down a little, although the clouds were still being driven from the sky. Maija could see the pale white moon rising over the great snowdrift to the east.

"Maija."

She turned to face him.

"Why did you come?"

Again his size was overwhelming. Igor was a giant, not a man. She said, "You are here, in my country. I have to keep watch on you, to know what you are doing."

"You told me that before, Maija. I think you believe it."

"Don't try to make me doubt myself, Igor. It won't work. I know what I'm saying." She knew it had been a mistake to come here. It would only encourage Igor.

"I hope you will stay here for a while," said Igor. "Will you share a meal with me? I—"

"No! Igor, I cannot eat your food."

"Maija, you ate with me before. Have I changed so much?"

"Do you remember what you did to me, and what I did to you?" She tapped the hilt of her knife. "Has your wound healed yet?"

"Has yours, Maija? I thought I understood you, and I was wrong. I paid for it, in blood and time. Maija! We were happy then, and we could be happy again. Why should we be apart like this?"

"Why don't you take me now, instead of waiting for me to give myself to you?"

"You have taught me restraint, Maija. I shall not force myself on you again."

"Then go away, leave me in peace and stay away from my lakes. I don't want you here!"

"Maija, I never abandon anything I want. I shall live here, waiting for you, until you come to me. You are alone now, but one day you will change your mind."

I am not alone, she thought, *I have Snowfriend.* Yet Snowfriend was different. She could talk to him, but he could not talk back. It was not the same as being with Timo . . . or with Igor.

Am I sufficient in myself, or am I incomplete without another? Her thoughts were taking strange paths these days. This giant before her, it was his doing.

"You have a picture of me in your mind," said Igor. "It has been changing under your hatred, as your memories become what you want them to become. It is not me at all. The picture is one you have made yourself, a picture of the enemy you think I should be. Maija, now that I am here, do you not remember what I am?"

"Stop it! Leave me alone!"

"I am not touching you, Maija. The thing you fear is something inside you."

"That's enough!" She had to get away from him. "I'm going back. Don't try to come after me!"

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He was still talking as she jumped down from the ship onto the snow. "Maija! I shall be here, until you come again!"

She ran for the shelter of the forest. She found the path and stumbled along it, hardly knowing where she was going. Somehow she sped through the trees to the shore of the next lake, and there she slowed down crossing the ice. She went on homewards at a more normal pace.

Presently she realized why she had fled from Igor. She had not been frightened. She had been ashamed.

The journey back to her hut was endless. Time itself had become frozen. At last she reached her lake and saw the old familiar timber dwelling before her. She could imagine Snowfriend curled up asleep in front of the oven.

The door was open! She remembered shutting it, yet it was open. She went up to the hut, her gun ready to fire.

"Who's there?" she called. "Come out!"

There was no sound. Perhaps the hut was empty. If so, where was Snowfriend? Maija was about to look inside when she saw a movement in the snow to her left.

Snowfriend dashed towards her, bounding along the bank like a fat round dog. She stared at him, glanced back at the open door, and laughed. Snowfriend had got tired of being kept in the hut. In the past Maija had owned several cats which could operate the latch from inside—and Snowfriend was more intelligent than any cat.

She caught him up in her arms and carried him inside. She supposed he had been lonely on his own. Well, she had neglected him today, but that was because of Igor. She would not neglect him again. And, if all went well, soon they would be in the land-without-men together.

In her dreams she could see the land-without-men already. There were no tears in her sleep tonight. She forgot Igor completely, and let Snowfriend take her into the country of endless evening, where the trees whispered in the soft breeze and the waterfall sang outside the cave. That waterfall fascinated her. In winter, when everything was frozen, she always longed for the water to come alive again. Life was so much better in the land-without-men, she thought in her dream. And in the closing minutes before she awoke, Snowfriend showed her the cave entrance. She awoke knowing the way into the land-without-men—and knowing too that only she must go that way. She dared not let any man find the tunnel into Snowfriend's country.

Timo had thought Snowfriend was a polar bear. Probably he wondered what a bear was doing down in this area. But he must not learn the truth any more than Igor. Maija knew what either of the hunters

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would do in the land-without-men. Timo would leave her alone, she was sure, but Igor might follow her. She had to make certain that he did not come after her. She could kill him, but somehow she no longer wanted to do that. Perhaps she could find some other way to deal with him.

This morning there was a chill east wind. The sun would not be out for long, Maija thought as she looked up at the sky. After breakfast, she stood outside the door and wondered what to do next. She could not go to the tunnel, that was certain. She wondered whether she should try to persaude Igor to go away. She was still wondering when she heard the shots.

The noise was faint but recognizable. At first she thought it was Igor hunting—the sound came from the right direction. Then she heard another shot, sharper and not so deep. It seemed to be a different weapon. She listened intently. A minute or two later, both guns fired at once.

Snowfriend, who had been sitting in the doorway, came out and stood beside her. She patted his shoulders.

"Perhaps I'm wrong, Snowfriend, but I think I recognize those guns. Igor and Timo."

That raised another question. "If it's Timo, what's he doing here?" She patted Snowfriend again. "I'll have to find out, Snowfriend. I must go and see what's happening."

His expression said clearly, "Am I going to be left in the hut again?"

"I can't let you come with me. I know I promised not to go off again, but it wouldn't be safe for you."

The men were probably shooting at each other. Neither man would fire at her, except by accident, but Snowfriend was something else. They might kill him for the sake of killing if they failed to kill each other.

She started to lead Snowfriend back inside, and then she remembered. There was no way of making him stay in the hut. He had learned how to open the catch, and she could not bolt the door from outside. She wondered about keeping him in the little peat shed, but that did not even have a bolt. Besides, it was not a nice place to put him.

She could not waste time here while the shooting was still going on. She went back inside and hastily prepared for the journey. Anorak, snowshoes, gloves, cap, knife, gun. . . .

Snowfriend would not come in for her. She had to carry him into the hut, telling him why he had to stay behind yet again. Maija was sure he understood, but not so sure he would obey. She closed the door on him and walked away, expecting him to come panting after her at any moment. To her relief, the door did not open, and each time she looked back it was still firmly shut.

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Eventually she arrived at the lake where Igor was living. Peering from the edge of the trees, she saw that the old wooden ship was deserted. The shooting was taking place at the east end of the lake, by the huge snowdrift.

It was no ordinary snowdrift. There had been buildings here once, tall solid buildings made of brick—a strange thing in this land where nearly all houses were made of timber. Now the buildings were ruined and empty, reduced to broken walls and piles of rubble. The blizzards had covered them with whiteness, filling up the hollows and the gaps between the walls, and the snow had drifted against the tallest of the ruins to form a great white hill. The huge snowdrift lay on the little plain between the head of the lake and the surrounding forests. On the lakeward side of the drift was the maze of ridges and hummocks, where the true surface of the ground was completely hidden. One step might sink an inch onto a mound of rubble, the next might sink six feet into a snow-filled passage. It was a perfect place for two men to stalk each other.

Maija could see them from where she stood. The two black dots seemed very small. One of them must be Igor—she fancied one of them was larger than the other—but was the second man Timo? It had to be. He was in the area, and he knew Igor had returned.

She had to make sure. It meant going right up to them and seeing for herself. She went through the woods and returned to the small lake she had just crossed. Her plan was to walk along to the east end of this lake, then circle round to the back of the snowdrift on the larger lake. This way she would have the forest between her and the men until the very end.

The shots continued as she went down the side of the small lake. She would reach Igor's opponent without any trouble, provided the men stayed where they were. The top of the snowdrift, just visible ahead, came nearer and nearer. Soon she was level with it, and then she reached the place where a little stream connected the two lakes.

She had not heard a shot for some time, she realized with a start. Perhaps the battle was over! She hurried through the trees, over the frozen stream, right up to the smooth white slope of the eastern face of the snowdrift. She went past the slope and round to the far side, passing the row of snow-covered chimney tops sticking up out of the drift like a series of bizarre sculptures. There was nobody in sight, but that meant nothing. The men could be anywhere in this chaos by now. Here the snow had swirled around the ruined walls and created a wilderness of little round hummocks and shapeless ridges. In several places the ridges were wide and high, as if an an-

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cient giant was buried beneath the snow.

As she surveyed the strange landscape before her, Maija saw a man come into view from behind a mound of snow. It was Timo.

He saw her at once, and motioned her to stay quiet. He crawled over the snow to join her.

"Don't let Igor see you," Timo whispered. "Stay behind cover. Let's get away from here."

Her questions would have to wait. She followed Timo into the trees, along a path which led them through an unusually large area of woodland. Timo did not stop until they were through the forest and standing by a tiny lake which was no more than a pond.

"Is this far enough?" Maija asked.

"Yes, for the moment," said Timo. "I don't think Igor will come after us. Now, what are you doing here?"

"I heard the shots. I knew Igor was up here, and I wanted to find out whom he was fighting—and why."

"You should not be so curious about your neighbors—it only leads to trouble. One of us might have shot you by mistake, and then where would you be?"

"I might have shot one of you," she said. "Igor is living in the old ship now, did you know that?"

"Yes. I suppose he means to move to your hut soon."

"I won't let him. Timo, why did you and Igor stop shooting at each other?" She did not ask why they had started.

"I'm almost out of ammunition. I'm going up to my supply dump for more bullets, and when I come back I'll finish the job."

"Will you? How many bullets did you waste without hitting him, Timo?"

"Too many. But sooner or later he would have stood up just a little too long." He shook his head, probably remembering the near misses. "Maija, I must be going—it isn't far, but if I take too long I may lose Igor."

He vanished into the trees. Maija watched him go, then turned and went back along the path. She had better leave the men to their duel and return when it was over.

This was spoiling her winter. As she walked on through the pine woods, she thought about this invasion of her country. It had been so peaceful until the men had come to disturb everything. It was a good thing she had the land-without-men to go to, now that the two hunters had spoiled her own land. Yet she could not hate either of them for it, not even Igor. The giant hunter had been right when he spoke to her yesterday: they had been happy together. She could think about him now without feeling a surge of anger. She could remember all the things she had forgotten in her hatred of him.

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"Maija!"

And Igor was waiting for her by the great snowdrift, as if her thoughts had called him to her. He seemed dark and huge against the snow. He must have come to see why Timo had stopped shooting.

His eyes were on the forest behind her. "Where is Timo?"

"He's gone to get more bullets. He'll be back."

"Good. I did not like to think of him fleeing."

Quite naturally, Maija found herself walking round the snow mountain with him. She was not sure how it had happened, but she accepted it.

"You were talking with Timo," said Igor. "Did he tell you what bad marksmen we both are?"

"Yes, he said he had wasted too many bullets. How could you miss each other so often?"

Igor pointed to the white confusion of snow and ice piled on the lake side of the snowdrift. "We were both moving about, using the old walls as cover. I have never seen a place like it."

Maija imagined him jumping up, firing, dropping down and twisting aside as a bullet tore through the snow six inches away. If she went over and looked, she would probably see traces of the duel in this hunter's nightmare. They crossed over to the firm surface of the frozen lake as soon as they could.

Maija could see the old wooden steamer in the distance ahead. There, two days ago, Timo had told her that Igor was coming. She and Snowfriend had been fishing happily, unaware that an enemy was on his way. Now she was walking towards the ship with that same enemy, and she was not even afraid.

You are with a man who may die today, said a voice in her head, the voice which whispered at moments such as this. Igor was persistent, but Timo was ruthless.

"What did you do while you were away, Igor?" she asked, to silence the unwelcome thoughts.

"You would like to know what I did?" He sounded hesitant.

"Yes. You must have gone somewhere—where?"

"I went down to the coast, where they were building the new roads. I worked there after I recovered."

And all the while he was thinking of the woman who had nearly killed him. She asked, "Did you like it there?"

"It is nice, but it is not like the lakes. It was a good life, though."

He spoke to her, this giant who said little to other people, and he told her about his season with the construction gangs taking the road ever further into the forest. His words gave her a picture of a grey stone ribbon stretching along the ground into a green jungle, with sweating men laboring at its head, felling the trees, spreading rubble over the dark earth. She found it oddly relaxing to hear his deep

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voice with its leisurely tales of summer.

Eventually they reached the old steamship, and she followed Igor up onto the deck. The hunter began to descend the little stairway to the empty engine room. His footsteps were loud on the planks.

Suddenly a small white form popped up out of a hole in the deck and leaped over the side. Snowfriend! He must have escaped and followed her!

Igor swung up his rifle and aimed at the creature dashing away over the ice. Maija gasped and cried "No!" as he fired.

Snowfriend went on running, but there were spots of red on the ice behind him.

"Why did you shout, Maija? I almost missed the animal."

She knocked down his rifle as he aimed again. "That's my Snowfriend! You shot him!"

Igor was staring at her. "Maija —"

She had to go after Snowfriend. She jumped down from the ship onto the ice and ran as fast as she could along the lake's edge. "Snowfriend! Stop!"

But the fugitive went on, drawing away from her. He was heading straight for the great snowdrift she and Igor had come from. If he turned aside into the trees she would lose him at once. She heard sounds behind her and knew that Igor was chasing her—or chasing Snowfriend. The thought gave her more speed, and the old rage was back, hot and bubbling under her skin. She could have killed Igor a dozen times over if he had been within reach, but she had to catch Snowfriend. If she lost him now, she might lose him forever.

He was beginning to slow down, but he was still far ahead. He had almost reached the snowdrift, with its bewildering maze of ancient snow-covered walls. Maija was still fifty feet behind Snowfriend when he dashed into the white wilderness and disappeared. She glimpsed him scrambling over an ice-covered ridge, and she plunged after him.

Maija had once visited a coastal beach where the cliffs had fallen and strewn the shore with boulders. Climbing over those great rocks had been bad enough, but at least she had had solid surfaces for her feet there. Here, nothing was solid. She kept sinking into the snow, and she could not take her eyes from ground level for a second. Beneath the thin snow there might be a pile of solid brick, or only another drop into a passage full of soft snow. Even when she found a firm ridge the old wall started collapsing as she stepped on it.

She managed to keep her balance on the crumbling vantage point and looked around for Snowfriend. There was no sign of him. The ridges and hollows in the snow were still and quiet. She called his name, and watched the drifts for

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a movement, but she saw nothing. He was gone. She might still visit the land-without-men, but now she would be alone there as well. She had lost Snowfriend.

Slowly, very slowly, she turned. The mixture of snow and crumbling brick shifted under her feet.

Igor had followed her. And now his size did not overawe her. Deliberately she brought up her rifle, aiming at the man who had shot Snowfriend.

"Maija, listen to me—"

He threw himself aside as she fired. Before she could get in a second shot the snow slid away beneath her, and she tumbled sideways into a snow-filled hollow.

She lay there for a moment, looking up at the grey sky, then got to her feet and stood up to search for Igor. He must have taken cover somewhere—she knew her shot had missed. She held her rifle ready and waited for him to show himself.

His head appeared briefly. She fired as he ducked down again, and the bullet buried itself in the snow above him.

"Maija," he cried, "I did not know the animal was one of your pets!"

Now she had his position. If he appeared for even a fraction of a second, she would shoot.

"Maija, you know I would never hurt a creature of yours. If you had told me, I would have left him alone!"

The rage within her could not be stilled by words. Snowfriend was lost in the winter forests, wounded, perhaps dying, and this time there was no Maija passing by to rescue him. She would go and search for him, of course, although she knew it to be hopeless. But first she would kill this man.

"Come out, Igor! Show yourself!"

There was no response to her challenge. Seized with the thought that Igor might escape, Maija advanced across the treacherous surface. Twice she slipped and fell up to her waist in unexpectedly deep drifts.

When she reached the spot where Igor had been, she found only the mark of her bullet. The trail in the snow showed that he had crawled away round one of the taller walls. He was retreating from her.

So she followed him, and in the chill timeless morning, her rage slowly gave way to a cold determination. She went after him methodically, forcing him back towards the forests. Whenever she saw him, she fired. Snowfriend existed only as an ancient memory: most of the time she could not remember why she was hunting Igor.

Presently she became aware that he was firing back at her. The shock awakened her from her dream-like state. Igor was behind a low mound which had accumu-

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lated round an isolated heap of bricks, the remains of a smaller side building. He must be lying flat on the snow. She saw that he could retreat no further without exposing himself.

Between Igor and the forest was a wide stretch of flat, open ground. If he left his present cover, he would have nowhere to go. Maija would have shot him before he had run five yards.

His first shots had gone wide—he must still be reluctant to kill her. She wondered if a bullet could go right through the mound. Probably it would be stopped by the bricks within the hummock.

"Maija!" Igor was calling to her again. She had heard him shouting several times before, but she had paid no attention. "Maija, how could you change like this? We walked across the lake together! I did not know the animal was yours!"

He had been saying the same things all through the hunt, repeating them over and over. Now, at the end of it all, she found herself answering him.

"I drove you out once before, Igor. I did not ask you to come back. You knew the welcome which awaited you."

"I had to return, Maija. I had to see you again."

"Am I so different from your other women?"

"You are, Maija. Your face is like an evil spirit, haunting me wherever I go. What else could I do but return?"

"You could stay away," she said. She came out from behind her hummock and stood facing his refuge. "You could stay away and forget you ever knew me."

There was a path of smooth flat snow between herself and Igor. Nothing blocked her view of the mound he was sheltering behind. She started moving towards him, walking beside the line of footprints he had left.

"No, Maija. I tried to forget you, but it was impossible."

He must have heard some slight sound of her approach, for he suddenly rose up from behind the mound and stood before her. Once more he seemed a giant.

"You see, Maija, I—love you."

She shook her head. There was no room for sympathy in her heart now. She aimed the rifle.

Igor fired first. His bullet smashed into her right arm, the sudden stinging pain merging with the sound of the shot.

Her gun fell to the snow. Igor moved forward to pick it up. Maija, clutching her arm, did not think of using her knife. The fierce passion of the hunt had gone, leaving a strange absence of purpose in her body. The knowledge that Igor had shot her was worse than the actual pain.

He moved towards her slowly, a curious expression on his face.

"Igor!"

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A tall grim hunter stood on the edge of the wood, gun in hand. Timo had returned.

Maija stared at him. She had been alone with Igor for so long that she had forgotten there were other people in the world.

Everything around them was silent, waiting. Igor breathed heavily. "So. I must face you both." He dropped Maija's gun and jerked up his own—but Timo fired before he could shoot. Igor staggered, tried vainly to fire at Timo, and collapsed onto the snow.

Maija gazed at the still body, her mind empty of emotion. Igor was dead.

Timo was coming towards her. She backed away. "Don't touch me!"

He halted a few feet from her. "Maija, let me look at your arm."

It was a command. He was not asking her to let him approach, he was ordering her to obey him. He had saved her from Igor, but he was still a man. She picked up her rifle with her left hand.

"Stay there, Timo! Don't follow me!" She circled round him, heading towards the forest behind him. His head turned to watch her, but she dared not look at his face. When she was between him and the woods, she turned and ran for the sanctuary of the trees. She did not stop until she was deep in the shadowy maze of the pines, leaning her trembling body against the sweet-smelling bark.

Nothing was real any more. Her world had changed too much in too short a time. Igor was dead, Timo was different, and Snowfriend was lost. If only she and Snowfriend could have gone to the land-without-men yesterday, before all this happened. . . .

Snowfriend! Now that her rage was past she knew how to find him again. Snowfriend had run from the lake into the icy wilderness of the snowdrift. He must have crossed the snowdrift and gone into the trees long ago. She could walk along the smooth snow on the eastern side of the great drift, find his trail and follow the footprints until she found Snowfriend himself. If Igor had not been there to distract her, she could have followed Snowfriend from the beginning.

Maija ignored her broken arm. Timo was right, it needed attention, but it would have to wait. Snowfriend was more important. She had a purpose again.

She emerged cautiously from the trees, well away from the spot where she had left Timo and Igor's body. There was nothing moving in sight. Satisfied that Timo was not here, she began her search. Here the snow was smooth, and she could see little footprints and claw marks on the powdery surface. Most of the prints had been made by the wild ducks.

At last she found Snowfriend's trail, with little red spots along the

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double line of round marks leading into the forest. Those prints could belong to no other creature. A little way along the trail, she came upon a familiar white form collapsed on the snow at the foot of a pine tree.

"Snowfriend," she said softly, stroking his head. "Wake up. It's Maija."

He made no response. He was even worse than he had been on the day she first saw him. She could only just detect his breathing, and Igor's bullet had made a great ugly wound in his side. The stain of red blood stood out vividly against his white fur.

"I'll take you home," said Maija. "You'll be safe there, Snowfriend."

Getting him onto her shoulders was almost impossible with her right arm useless. He seemed far heavier than before. After a long struggle she managed to haul him onto her back. She stood up shakily, holding him in position with her good hand.

"It's all right, Snowfriend, we're going home." She started walking slowly back along the way she had come, her body bent under her burden. The feeling had gradually gone out of her broken arm, leaving it numb. It had stopped bleeding some time ago.

She knew were to find the hidden entrance to the land-without-men. This was the way.

She went on talking, speaking her thoughts aloud, although she knew he could not hear her. "It's over now, Snowfriend. I'll get you home and there won't be any more men around. They won't follow us."

She was walking unsteadily under his weight, but she kept moving. She would reach that tunnel no matter how hard the journey was. "We'll be all alone there, Snowfriend. We'll stay there in your cave and watch the waterfall together. Nobody else at all, Snowfriend. Just you and me together in the evening. Just you and me."

She stumbled on across the snow.

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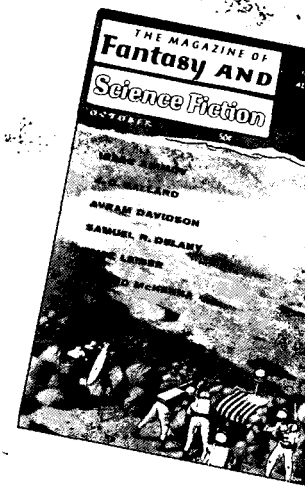

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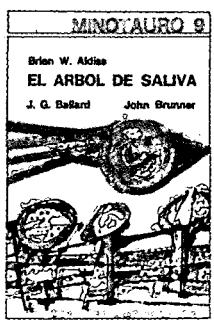

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